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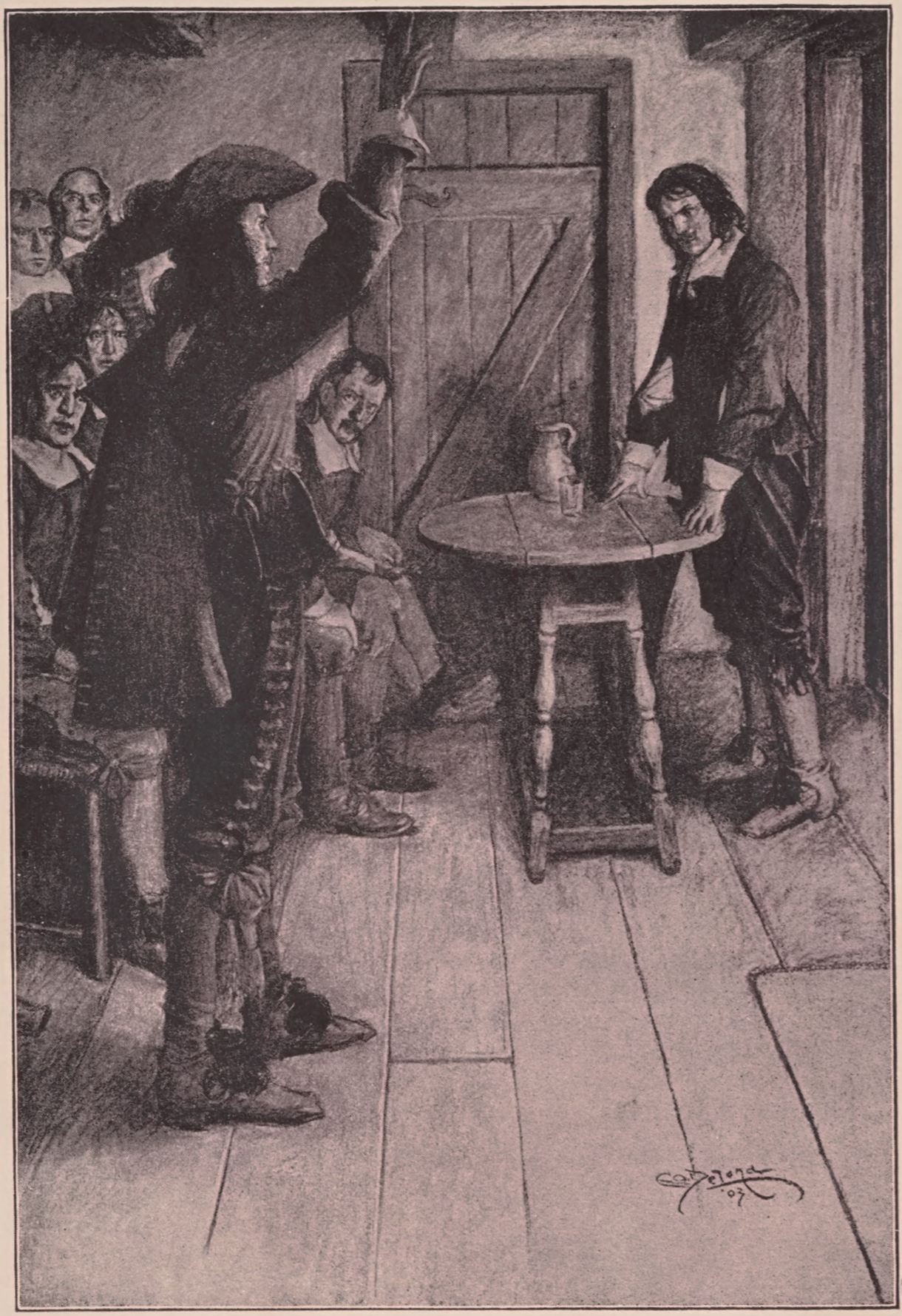

"ROGER WILLIAMS, I CHARGE YOU TO HOLD YOUR PEACE!"

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4390

With PURITAN *and* PEQUOT

by
William Murray Graydon
Author of
"In the Days of Washington"
etc.

Illustrated
by
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With Puritan and Pequot.

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With Puritan and Pequot

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH MASTER JENNICOM HATH A TROUBLED MIND

Jeremy Quills, town watchman of New Plymouth, sat quietly in a block of stone in the middle of the gloomy square. His chin rested on his chest, and his arms dangled limply between his sprawled-out legs, across which rested a long double-barreled musket. A brazier stood near by on three rusty feet, keeping company with a group of cannon, and its fire, sunk to a mass of glowing embers, still burst at intervals to a little blaze that threw ruddy flashes toward the surrounding houses and the dark mouths of the four diverging streets. It is very much to be feared that Jeremy Quills, town watchman, was asleep.

A dog barked in the distance, and as

though startled Jeremy suddenly sprang to his feet. He picked up his musket, and looked guiltily about him. Then he caught up an armful of pitched wood, but ere he could throw it into the brazier he discerned the silvery-gray flush, as yet very faint, that was trembling on the eastern horizon.

"There's no occasion for it now," he said aloud, letting the wood fall. "'Tis half after three o'clock, and a fine ——"

He turned sharply on his heel at the sound of footsteps, and saw indistinctly a little group of men approaching from the right, along the upper side of the square. With light, regular tread, with glint of steel and clank of armor, they came on as far as the corner by the Governor's house, where at a low word of command they halted.

"After three o'clock, and a fine morning," mumbled Jeremy. "The Lord hath delivered us from the perils and snares of the ungodly, from bloody-minded redskins and all evil things of the forest, through the dark watches of another night. Praised be his name! Amen! And yonder, I vow, be Captain Standish and his company. At sunset went

they forth, seeking a strange craft suspected of intent to land weapons and strong waters for unlawful barter with the savages. And with what result? Empty-handed? Ay, 'tis even so."

The file of soldiers was in motion again, quickly and quietly marching up the street, and their leader, having dismissed them to the fort, was crossing the open space at a brisk gait. As he drew near, making to pass within a few feet of the brazier, the flickering glow of the embers touched his sword and firelock, and played athwart the stern, handsome face that in the past had been wont to strike terror to the hearts of Spanish foemen in the Low Countries, and now was feared and respected by the lawless element of the Plymouth plantation.

"My respects to you, sir," ventured Jeremy, saluting properly with his forefinger as he addressed the bluff, eagle-eyed old soldier. "Didst fall in with any of the pestilent rogues, might I ask?"

Captain Miles Standish ignored the reference to his fruitless expedition.

"My man, art desirous of a reprimand from

the Governor?—not to speak of worse things," he said curtly. "Look you, the darkest hour is just before the dawn, and yet you've neglected your fire when 'twas most needed. Have a care, Quills, lest you be brought to the pillory."

With that the Captain passed on, striding waterward to take boat to his home at Duxbury, the sister settlement across an arm of the harbor. And Jeremy, his vigil ended, pondered the rebuke uneasily as he toddled off to breakfast and bed, with his back to the breaking day.

Early as was the hour, Plymouth was awake and astir. Smoking chimneys began to pour their incense to the cool air, and the first wreathing blue column to thus signal the morning came from a house that stood on high ground, near the northern verge of the town. Its owner, Carver Jennicom, rose at the same hour winter and summer, and took pride in his Spartan habits, though oddly enough he allowed more indulgence to the adopted son who shared his home. When he had set the fire burning, and had called twice up the ladder, it was time to unbar the door

and outer gate to admit Remembrance Tybbott, a widow neighbor who, for housewifely purposes, had filled the shoes of Dame Patience Jennicom since that worthy woman's decease ten years before.

The widow having gone forth to milk the cow, Master Jennicom lighted a lanthorn, took a key from his pocket, and unlocked the massive door of a deep closet that was built to one side of the fireplace. He shut himself within, and standing the lanthorn on a low shelf that held inkhorn, quills, and pounce-box, with a second key he opened an English chest of carved oak.

From beneath a heap of clothing, where it rested cheek-by-jowl with two bulging canvas-bags, Jennicom drew a large, thick volume, brass-clamped and bound in age-worn leather. It was his treasured diary, and though never a morning passed but he made personally sure of its safety, the records inscribed within were often weeks apart. To-day, however, he was in the purpose to write, and having spread the book open on the lid of the chest, himself seated on a stool, he dipped a quill into the ink.

"Ye 29th of May, 1636," he scrawled slowly

and minutely. "I begin greatly to fear that ye cherished and Godly designs whereof I have steadfastly hoped that a brand from the burning ——"

He stopped, pondering with knitted brow and pursed lips, then wrote industriously on to the bottom of the page, when he sprinkled sand on the wet lines, and with a sigh closed the heavy volume and restored it to its hiding-place. A moment later chest and closet were tight-locked on their secrets, and the stern-faced Puritan was searching the Scripture for a suitable chapter with which to commence the day's labors.

Meanwhile Rufus Jennicom had leisurely pulled on his homespun clothing, his thick hose and shoes, and was now standing by the gable window of the sleeping-loft—a tall, well-knit lad of eighteen, with tawny brown hair and eyes a shade darker, and a fine easy carriage that lost none of its inherent grace by reason of his uncomely garb.

The window commanded the greater part of the settlement, and the view from it had been familiar to Rufus Jennicom's eyes for twelve years and more. Why he had lingered

on this particular morning to see the day-birth repeat itself, what strange leaven was working in his boyish mind, he could not have told. But there he stood, gravely quiet, while the saffron-tinted sky in the east brightened and spread, and Carver Jennicom waited impatiently below.

Rising from the far rim of the Atlantic, leaping the rocky, wind-swept peninsula of Cape Cod and flushing across the waters of the inner sea, the radiant May sun kissed the huddled craft in the harbor, threw the outlines of the landing-wharf into bold relief, and streamed wantonly among the haunts of men. Sixteen years earlier, and naught save the primeval forest, dark and forbidding, would have greeted the sunrise. The forest was there still, a thing of superstitious terrors and real dangers, ever present to the minds of the sturdy settlers; but in its very jaws, clinging obstinately to the cleared soil, now nestled the little town that the Pilgrim fathers had planted.

Straight from the shore mounted the main street, comfortably wide, and with detached houses ranged at intervals on both sides, each built of hewn planks, boasting its bit of gar-

den, and well stockaded for security. Midway up ran a cross-street, with four cannon in the middle of the open square, and at one corner the more pretentious residence of the Governor. Climb yet higher, to the crown of the hill, and you would have come to the fort, squarely and stoutly made, sweeping the country roundabout, and with six pieces of frowning artillery planted on its flat roof, a constant menace to insidious foes. Here the colonists held their town meetings, and here regularly attended church service, marching thither in military array, to listen to the sermon with one hand clasping the cold steel of musket or firelock, with one ear for the minister and one for the call of alarm.

The harsh and unlovely aspects of human life, the monotony of daily toil, the struggle for bare existence, the perpetual companionship of men who shaped their religion in the gloomiest possible mould—such were the thoughts that stirred vaguely in Rufus Jennicom's heart, as he gazed from the window at sea and forest and town. He felt a sudden discontent, a burning grievance against the law of destiny.

"I am tired of it all," he told himself, and not for the first time. "Work, and bed, and work again, with a long sermon twice on Sundays, and now and then a day's shooting or fishing. 'Twas different when Master Brewster was here, for in the evenings ——"

"Rufus! Rufus!"

The peremptory hail broke the lad's reveries, and stifling his rebellious mood he descended the ladder to the ground floor. Carver Jennicom straightened his six feet of bone and sinew. He had been a game-keeper in former years, and though now verging on sixty he was still erect and vigorous, a man of iron will and body, with a rugged, weather-beaten face that bore the stamp of his character. Imbued with the deep religious feelings that made dissenters from the Church of England, almost a fanatic on some points and yet capable of kindly impulses and strong affections, he was an admirable type of the early Puritan.

"You've loitered over long," he said coldly. "What kept you?"

"I—I was thinking," Rufus stammered.

"Of what, lad?"

"Indeed, I hardly remember, sir."

The old man gave him a keen glance, but said no more. He read briefly from the Bible, followed with a prayer, and then the two sat down to their frugal breakfast; after which, leaving Dame Tybbott to her pots and kettles, they went off to cultivate their allotment across the town, each burdened with hoe and musket.

Though the sun had not yet appeared above the horizon, Plymouth was as wide-awake as ever it would be. From doors and gateways the women-folk saw the men setting forth to their various pursuits, some to toil in fields of springing corn and maize, some to fell hard timber for shipment to England; others to reap the harvest of the sea, or turn the white-fleshed fish on the curing-racks, while a few, traveling in company and armed to the teeth, filed solemnly into the forest trails in quest of Indians who had furs to barter for the products of civilization.

Governor Bradford, in loose gown and easy cap, took the air in his garden, and from a narrow window over the jail door a haggard face, pressed against the bars, ruefully surveyed the pillory and the whipping-post. So the day

began in New Plymouth, and over all the moving scene on that May morning of 1636, over surrounding forest and far-reaching sea, trained eyes watched from the flat top of the fort; for eternal vigilance was the price our Puritan fathers paid for the safety of the anchorage they had snatched from the New England wilderness.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH SIR LANSLOTT CHARMION COMES TO PLYMOUTH

THE day wore on, languid with heat and drowsy with the hum of insects, until the noon hour. Now, from field and forest, might have been seen a number of the absent toilers trooping back into the settlement, and among them Carver Jennicom and his son, as Rufus was commonly regarded by the Plymouth folk. Dinner was waiting for them, and in lonely silence they began to eat and drink, Remembrance Tybbott having bustled off to her own home across the way, where she had a grown nephew to feed and look after.

All the morning Jennicom had been preoccupied, deep in thought, while he heaped the soft earth around the tender green shoots of the maize. This moody frame of mind he brought to the table, uttering not a syllable himself, and giving his companion no encouragement to speak. At the same moment they pushed their platters aside and rose, the man

reaching for the well-worn Bible that lay on a shelf.

"Sit you down again, lad," he said. "A reading from the Good Word will not come amiss ere we return to our ——"

"Hark!" Rufus broke in. "Do you hear? —'tis like men shouting."

Jennicom's ear, a little less keen than the lad's, had also caught a confused noise in the distance. Just then a dog began to bark furiously in a neighboring garden, and Rufus hastened to the window. A frown grew on Jennicom's brow as he stood holding the book open in his hands. The next instant it was closed and on the shelf, for Dame Tybbott had rushed into the room, her face flushed like a winter apple.

"Alack-a-day! Mercy on us!" she cried. "Hast heard the news, Master Jennicom? A ship—a great ship—in sight! 'Tis filled with cannon and armed men, who've surely been sent to visit the King's wrath upon us. What's to be done? Oh, what's to be done?"

"Quiet yourself, good dame, and curb that loose tongue of yours," Jennicom sternly bade her.

"'Tis true—'tis true as gospel," wailed the frightened old woman. "Master Brigges told me——"

"I'll believe naught till I see with my own eyes. Come, Rufus," he added, "and we'll look into this unlikely tale."

He picked up his musket, put it down contemptuously, and then followed the lad from the house, while Dame Tybbott sank breathless and trembling into a high-backed chair.

The dog having ceased to bark by the time Jennicom and Rufus emerged from the gateway of the palisade, they could distinctly hear the clamor that was now ringing from end to end of the town. Picking up others on the way, they hurried on to the open space by the Governor's residence, where they found a state of affairs that did indeed lend some color to the dame's alarming story.

There was a great noise of shouting and calling, with shriller cries of terrified women and children. From all sides men in sombre cloaks and steeple-crowned hats, in steel caps and corselets, carrying firelocks, swords, and side-arms, were running to and fro; some aimlessly, some up the hill, but for the most

part down toward the harbor. Governor Bradford was standing at his gate, plainly giving orders to an excited group that surrounded him. A thick jet of smoke flashed on the roof of the fort, and a cannon spoke with thunderous voice to summon tardy stragglers from the forest.

Rufus climbed to one of the four pieces of ordnance, which had already been shifted to a better position, and over the house-tops at the foot of the hill he caught a glimpse of snowy canvas far across the bay.

"Look! look!" he exclaimed. "There she is!"

"Ay, a King's ship," cried Jeremy Quills, who was gunner as well as watchman, and had tumbled out of his bed at the first alarm. "And what will she be bringing but armed men to enforce his Majesty's demands? 'Tis a woeful day for Plymouth."

To account for the disquieting apprehensions that had disturbed the noonday peace of Plymouth, it is necessary to go back to the previous year, 1635, when a most unpopular and odious measure was instigated by the authorities at home against their self-govern-

ing subjects of New England. Part of the blame rested with Archbishop Laud, who had seen with disapproval how the colony of Massachusetts Bay was becoming a stronghold for his religious foes, the Puritans and non-conformists; part lay with a few jealous and influential persons, members of the old council for New England. The result was an action brought by the law officers of the Crown in the Court of King's Bench, and a judgment obtained against the Massachusetts colony—and applying equally to the adjacent Plymouth colony—declaring its charter forefeited, its government transferred to the King's hands, and authorizing the despatch of a Governor-General to rule both plantations.

On the news crossing the sea, submission was undreamed of, and the magistrates decided to resist by force. A mediator was appointed and sent to England, and meanwhile fortifications were erected in Boston harbor and at Charlestown and Dorchester, citizens were drilled in the use of arms, and beacons were stacked on all the sentry hills. But the King's poverty, the ominous signs of revolution at home and the tardiness of the tax-payers,

doubtless prevented a bloody fray in America. Weeks grew to months, and the judgment was not enforced. The sister colonies lived on under their forfeited charters pretty much as if nothing had happened, though none knew how long they would remain undisturbed or what mischief was brewing over sea. Thus you can understand how the rumored approach of a King's ship bearing an armed force, on that May morning of 1636, roused the martial spirit of the Plymouth settlers, and found them anxious but determined, ready to fight for their rights should it be necessary.

Many people had flocked to the shore, where they darkened the landing wharf, and swarmed thickly to right and left of it, along the water's edge. With some difficulty Carver Jennicom pushed his tall figure through the crowd, Rufus dogging his heels. The strange vessel, whatever she might be, was certainly of no small dimensions. She was as yet three or four miles distant, and it was a pretty sight to see her forging ahead under full sail, with a puffy stern wind bellying her white canvas, beating south by west across the inner bay. Eager eyes kept pace with her, and men

spoke with bated breath, in earnest, deep-toned voices, of the possibility of a conflict.

"'Tis a monster, sure—and a man-of-war, I'm thinking," said one, "and the bright spots will be the shine o' her guns at the port-holes."

"D'ye ken whether or no she lugged round Cape Cod?" questioned another, a Scotchman.

"Nay, Dugald, 'twas straight down the bay she came," a third replied. "I glimpsed her long afore she began to stand in. She's just out of Salem or Boston, to my mind."

"Had she touched at either of those ports we should have received some word from Governor Vane," shrewdly observed Jennicom. "That is, if the ship be what we take her for. But 'tis by no means certain, my friends, that——"

The finish of the sentence was lost in sudden cheering, and the crowd swayed and split to allow the passage of a cannon mounted on a rude truck. Jeremy Quills marched in front of it, and others brought up the rear with powder and ball. The piece had no sooner been loaded than a fresh diversion was

caused by the beaching of a small boat that had crossed the harbor inlet. Jeremy's acquaintance of the previous night stepped ashore, followed by several companions.

"Hurra for Captain Standish!" impulsively cried Rufus.

The lad's example found ready imitators, and many pressed about the gallant old soldier, who had shared the burdens and responsibilities of Plymouth since the landing of the Mayflower, to ask his opinion of the present crisis.

"Wait and see," was the Captain's only rejoinder, as he pushed by to gain the mouth of the street.

"He's all for fighting, depend on't," said Jeremy. "But he'll speak with the governor first."

The ripple of interest caused by the arrival of Captain Standish was short-lived. Again all eyes turned seaward. Newcomers joined the throng unperceived, and during the next quarter of an hour excitement rose to fever heat. Nearer and nearer forged the strange vessel, a wake of translucent water dancing behind her keel; the crosses of St. George and St. Andrew fluttering from the mast-top, and

the tracery of spars and rigging growing more sharply defined against the snowy canvas.

"From her cut I'd no take her for a man-o'-war," said Dugald Fisher. "She's liker to a merchantman, and I'm doubting if she carries any soldiers."

"Chock full of 'em, I tell ye," vowed Jeremy Quills. "They're hiding below. Shall I send a shot across her bows, Master Jennicom?"

"Wouldst offer a wanton affront?" cried Jennicom. "Stand aside," and with that he planted himself before the muzzle of the cannon.

A low, half-suppressed murmur ran among the people, to break the next moment into exclamations of surprise and relief, as the ship swung slowly round, broadside to the spectators. Large she was, deep-waisted and with lofty poop and forecastle, but plainly not a fighting craft in the proper sense of the word. Instead of armed men in the King's uniform, only a few soberly-clad persons looked over the bulwark; instead of tiers of ordnance, her portholes gave but a glimpse of a culverin here and there.

She came on another hundred yards, lower-

ing sail, and then her anchor was heaved overboard with a splash. A boat was immediately let down, and began to pull toward the shore.

"There will be no fighting to-day," cried Rufus.

"The Lord be praised!" Carver Jennicom said fervently. "We have indeed been hasty of judgment."

The suspense changed to joy and curiosity. Jeremy and his assistants, made the sport of unmerited laughter and ridicule, sullenly took themselves off with their piece of cannon. The ship's errand was still indeterminate, since there was no sign of emigrants on her deck.

"She will be bringing a visitor," said Dugald Fisher.

"Or a message for the Governor," suggested Rufus.

The boat drew rapidly near, coming in a little above the landing-wharf. Three sailors were rowing, and in the stern sat a weather-beaten, seafaring man, who stood to his feet directly the keel struck the beach. A merry, furtive twinkle in his eyes told that he had grasped the situation.

"Look you, good friends," said he, "my name is Abel Teague, and I'm Captain of yonder vessel, the Marygold, on which at the present moment a young gentlewoman is somewhat indisposed. I come at her father's bidding to seek the attendance of a doctor or apothecary. Is any such among you?"

"We had a doctor, sir," replied Dugald Fisher, "but he's lately removed to Charlestown."

"You'll find Master Jennicom there every whit as good," spoke up Dame Tybbott's nephew, who was near by. "Hath any a better knowledge of herbs and simples? You'll mind how he cured my aunt of a lingering fever last winter twelvemonth."

"Ay, ay," chimed in several others.

"If this be true," said Captain Teague, addressing himself to Jennicom, "will you go aboard with me?"

"'Twould be ungracious to refuse, sir, though I fear my humble services will be of little avail," Jennicom replied, after an instant of hesitation. "I've studied the use of some of nature's simplest remedies, but can lay no claim to the calling of a physician. Turning

to Rufus he added: "Off in haste, lad, and fetch the wallet from the chest behind the door."

Rufus started on a run, and in less than a quarter of an hour he was back, carrying a leather pouch stuffed with dried roots and herbs of the forest.

"Come with us, if you like," said Captain Teague, seeing the lad's wistful countenance; and Rufus was aboard before his father could offer any objection.

The sailors bent to the oars, and the crowd that lined the beach, now swelled to a larger number, gazed after the receding boat as if they mistrusted its purpose.

"There's little amiss with the young woman," the captain whispered at Jennicom's ear, "but her father—you'll understand his anxiety. He's a grand gentleman at home, I may tell you, and he hath a mission in these parts on behalf of the King."

"He will scarcely be welcome," Jennicom replied gravely.

"That's a pity," murmured Captain Teague. "However, it has naught to do with me."

No more was said. On reaching the vessel

the Captain climbed first to the deck, and his companions had no sooner put foot beside him than a richly-attired gentleman of middle age came quickly up to the three. To Rufus, who had within memory seen no greater personage than Governor Winthrop of Salem, this splendid gallant was a revelation. His eyes fell before the handsome, florid face, with its pointed beard and twisted mustaches; he covertly observed the long, dark locks sweeping the neck, the slashed doublet and cloak, the murrey-colored breeches and silken hose. And if the lad showed some confusion, Carver Jennicom did no less, though after a different fashion. At sight of the stranger he gave a slight start, and his bronzed features turned a shade paler. For an instant he was as one in two minds, then stood erect with squared shoulders.

"Sir Lanslott, this is Master Jennicom of Plymouth," said Captain Teague, breaking an awkward silence. "No doctor is he, but one acquainted with the properties of medicinal herbs."

Sir Lanslott Charmion looked once at Jennicom, and twice at Rufus.

"I am vastly in your debt," said he, in a voice that blended sweetness and hauteur, "and shall be more so if you will try your skill upon my daughter's indisposition. Pray follow me," with a gesture that included the lad.

"Let him remain here," Jennicom demurred coldly.

"Nay, with your permission," said Sir Lanslott. "Lightsome youth," he added with a smile, "may be more potent than drugs to the patient."

He led both to the cabin, which was furnished with arras hangings, a carpet and chests amazingly carved, on one of which a silver flagon stood flanked by goblets of colored glass and chased gold. On a couch to the left languidly reclined a young girl of seventeen or eighteen, with a face of patrician beauty. Ringlets of a raven hue touched her snowy neck. Her sleeves were looped with pearls, and jewels glittered on her slim white fingers.

The evidences of luxury and refinement around him, the subtle fragrance of perfumes, were to Rufus as a breath from an unknown,

undreamed of world. Yet, save for a heightened color, he stood quite at his ease, as if to the manner born.

"Annis, my child," said Sir Lanslott, "here is Master Jennicom, of whose healing powers the good people of Plymouth speak most highly."

A petulant shrug was the invalid's only sign that she heard. Jennicom, bending over the couch, rested one hand lightly on her forehead and with the other held her pulse.

"I can find no trace of any disorder," he said curtly.

"And indeed there is none to find, sir," cried the girl, sitting suddenly up, and flashing a bold glance at Rufus from her violet eyes. "Father, I—I am not ill. 'Twas but a pretense."

"A pretense!" exclaimed Sir Lanslott. "You dare to tell me to my face that you've deceived me! Zounds, young lady, this almost exceeds belief. Be assured that I shall not lightly pass over ——"

"Nay, pardon me, dear father," she broke in, laughingly. "I'd no desire to leave the vessel to-day, since at Salem the people all

wore such gloomy, depressing faces, and such ugly cloaks and steeple-crowned hats, and stared at me so fiercely. But now," and she glanced again at Rufus with a pretty, pouting blush, "now, if 'tis your pleasure, I will go ashore and take the Plymouth air."

"Whimsome baggage!" gasped Sir Lanslott, choking between mirth and indignation. "Faith, 'tis hard to fathom a woman's moods."

"If I am no longer required ——" began Jennicom.

"I am none the less in your debt," said Sir Lanslott, slipping a hand into his pocket, "and if you will permit me ——"

"Keep your gold, sir," Jennicom interrupted quickly. "I've done you no service, nor were it otherwise could I accept any payment."

Frowning impatiently he bowed and left the cabin, followed by Rufus and the baronet; and peals of merry laughter from Mistress Annis floated after them to the deck.

"She is but a child, and should be treated as such," apologized Sir Lanslott, as the visitors descended to the waiting boat. "Your

worthy Governor is doubtless aware of my arrival and of my errand," he added. "I intend very shortly to pay my respects to him."

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH THE GOVERNOR LENDS HIMSELF TO A PLOT

THE discontent of the early morning, which had partly worn off in the maize-field, assailed Rufus with fresh force after his visit to the Marygold. He had been afforded a glimpse, so to speak, of another world, a world that seemed as far remote from Plymouth as were the very stars in the heavens. His mind ran on ungodly and pagan things—as he had been taught to deem them—during the short trip across the harbor, and his abstracted, dreamy countenance was an index which Carver Jennicom could not fail to read correctly, and which caused him no little vexation of spirit.

Many persons were still clustered by the water, unwilling to believe that the big ship dancing yonder on the ocean swell meant no harm to the town. They surged nearer the boat as it ran in to land its passengers, which done, it at once put out again. Rufus, jostled on all sides, suddenly missed his father, and

was vainly seeking a glimpse of him when a hand was clapped on his shoulder and he was spun round.

"Look ye, lad, art certain the vessel carries no soldiers?" demanded Jeremy Quills, in a whisper.

"I saw none," Rufus replied.

"Then what's her errand?"

"She brings Sir Lanslott Charmion, who hath business with the Governor," was the thoughtless admission.

"Oh, ay, a fine gentleman from England! A King's deputy, I'll warrant. We want none such here, unless he comes to restore the charter which a pack of meddlesome fellows over-sea have declared to be so much waste paper."

"I think he will please himself," Rufus answered coldly.

"He had best think of others first," said Jeremy, his leathery face wrinkling in an evil scowl; and with that he moved away from the lad, who stood gazing after the receding boat.

"There may be trouble," he reflected uneasily. "If Sir Lanslott comes ashore he will do well to leave his daughter behind."

Meanwhile Carver Jennicom, having got clear of the crowd, was mounting the street with lengthy strides, bent on making short and thorough work of a plan that he had been turning in mind since he left the cabin of the Marygold. He suffered no interruption on the way, nor slackened speed until he drew near the residence of the Governor, with whom he was on terms of long-standing friendship and intimacy.

"'Tis an affair of a private nature," he told the servant who promptly admitted him to the house.

"The worshipful Governor is engaged, sir," was the reply. "Will you step up-stairs?"

He preceded the visitor to an apartment on the floor above, where, left alone for a considerable time, Jennicom paced restlessly to and fro, eyeing with disapproval the portraits on the walls, the carved Elizabethan chairs, and the folio tomes that lay on a table in company with quills, inkhorn, and a sheaf of writing-paper. Then the door opened, and the man who had borne more than his share of the fortunes of the Mayflower, who had been chosen second Governor of the settle-

ment before that terrible winter of 1620 was over, quietly entered the room. Scholarly and refined, shrewd of counsel and strenuous in action, one without enemies—such was William Bradford, chief magistrate of the Plymouth Colony, and now in the prime of life.

"Good-day to you, Jennicom," he said, passing a hand wearily across his brow. "Pray be seated. I can spare you a few minutes, though indeed I've had a busy morning. I've just dismissed Captain Standish, who returns to Duxbury. Ah, my worthy friend, the cares of office begin to weigh heavily, and I fear they will sadly interrupt my history of the Plymouth Plantation. 'Tis a pity, but——" He picked up a bunch of manuscript; put it down again. "I've heard of your visit to the Marygold," he continued. "Was it Sir Lanslott Charmion's daughter who was indisposed?"

"There was no need of my services," Jennicom replied with a frown; and in a few words he told of the girl's deceit, not forgetting to quote her opinion of the good people of Salem.

"Mistress Charmion will find Plymouth no

more to her taste," commented the Governor, a smile hovering about the corners of his mouth. "Tell me, do you know aught concerning Sir Lanslott?" he added.

His penetrating glance caused Jennicom to misunderstand the question. He flushed and grew embarrassed.

"I—I have seen him before," he answered, "years ago in England."

"I referred to his charge in these parts," said Mr. Bradford, regarding his companion with some surprise. "A messenger arrived here an hour ago—an adventure with bloody-minded savages delayed his journey—bringing me a letter from young Governor Vane, the newly-appointed magistrate of the Bay Colony. His communication covers various matters, but dwells chiefly on the touching of the Marygold at Salem, where she landed a company of new settlers. For three days Sir Lanslott and his daughter were the guests of Mr. Vane, and it appears that this English baronet hath been commissioned by the King to visit the dominions of the Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay Companies, note their condition, and urge upon those in authority the wisdom of accept-

ing the judgment of the Court of King's Bench."

"Humph! to the end that he be appointed Governor-General to rule over us all."

"I know nothing of his ambitions, Jennicom. He is a man of substance, with estates near Jamestown in Virginia, and he intends to reside there for some months before returning to England."

"The sooner he goes the better. No good can come of his errand to the Bay."

"I fear not," assented Governor Bradford with a sigh. "Mine is an arduous and difficult post, Jennicom, and I would that I were ten years younger. The visit of Sir Lanslott Charmion is a sign of the King's weakness—that shadow will pass. But other clouds are gathering on the horizon to menace the peace and security of both plantations. There can be little doubt, from what Captain Standish tells me, that the unlawful sale of firearms to the savages is increasing. Roger Williams in Salem, and Anne Hutchinson in Boston, continue boldly to utter their seditious and harmful doctrines—a well-meaning man is Williams, but most unsettled in judgment. And

the Connecticut Valley, with its scattered settlements, is threatened with a rising of the Pequot Indians."

"A Pequot rising would hardly stop at that," observed Jennicom, anxiously. "Once they're out of leash, there will be bloody times to follow."

"I take your meaning," replied the Governor. "Other tribes might not hold aloof. The Narragansetts, for instance. Let us pray that the danger be averted—'tis too frightful to contemplate."

Jennicom nodded. He leaned forward in his chair, plucking nervously at the crown of his hat, his eyes fixed on vacancy, as if he was at a loss to know how to broach the affair next his heart. The Governor, seating himself at the table, drew quill and paper to him.

"The day is all too short," he said pointedly. "At any moment I may be called upon to receive Sir Lanslott Charmion. And not a word as yet have I written in answer to Mr. Vane."

"You're sending a reply?—by the same messenger?"

"Just so."

Jennicom rose up, mustering courage.

"A word with you, sir—I'll not detain you long," he exclaimed. "I've been greatly troubled in mind of late. 'Tis about Rufus, who shows signs of a discontented spirit, and chafes like a bird that flutters against the bars of its cage. You know, sir, how carefully I've watched over him, how zealously I've sought to keep his feet in the paths of Puritan rectitude and manliness. And now ——"

"Restless moods are natural to youth," broke in the Governor. "Rufus is a fine lad —not your own son, I believe?"

"An adopted child, sir. Left an orphan at the tender age of three. His father was—was very dear to me."

"And of your own station in life?"

"By your leave, sir, I would rather not answer that question," pleaded Jennicom, in a low tone.

"You need not," said the Governor, hastily. "I've no wish to force your confidence. But to proceed. Pray tell me, old friend, what can I do for you?"

"I want the lad away from Plymouth for a time," Jennicom replied doggedly. "This is

no place for him now—'twill take very little to fill his head with worldly and unrighteous desires."

"I think I understand, Jennicom. But how can I help you?"

"'Tis very simple. Let Rufus, instead of the messenger, be the bearer of the letter to Governor Vane. There must be a fair pretext for his departure, lest he suspect my object."

"You wish him to go to Boston?"

"Ay, and to stop there for a fortnight or a month, in the household of Nathaniel Brewster."

"A most worthy person—our loss is Boston's gain. I heartily approve your plan, Jennicom, and if you will send the lad to me ——"

"I will fetch him at once, sir."

"Nay, not so fast. Better wait until ——" He paused to listen. "Is that the wind rising? D'you hear it? We're going to have a storm."

"'Tis never the wind," Jennicom answered gravely. "If I mistake not, sir, the King's envoy is already on his way hither, and the people are none too pleased at the sight of him."

"I believe you're right," exclaimed the

Governor, in an anxious tone. "Come, this must be seen to."

From the sitting-room, which was on the west and landward side of the house, they passed into an adjoining bedchamber that looked over the town to the harbor. At once the vague murmur that had roused their apprehensions took the sound of many voices blended in one deep, growling note, like the continuous roar of breakers on a pebbly strand. Hastening to the window they beheld Sir Lanslott Charmion and Captain Teague, one on each side of Mistress Annis Charmion, just emerging from the top of the hilly street into the open space, while close in their rear pressed a sullen, threatening crowd of men and boys, who formed a sombre background for the gay attire of the baronet and his daughter.

"I'll not interfere," said the Governor. "The demonstration is harmless."

"Ay, and so is a keg of powder, till a spark ignites it," observed Jennicom.

Displaying courage and coolness in the face of such trying circumstances, the little group came on for a moment with neither quick nor lagging steps, Sir Lanslott's hand resting

lightly on the hilt of his sword, the girl's face very white under her plumed hat, and Captain Teague glancing furtively from one side to the other. Then the mob, in their turn reaching the square, drew suddenly nearer from behind, at the same time pushing farther ahead to right and left, as if to surround the three. The churlish grumbling flashed all at once into a virulent outburst:

"He's on King's business!" "Ay, he can't deny it!" "Cut them off!" "Drive them back to their ship!" "We'll have no meddling with our charter!"

These and other cries floated distinctly to the ears of the Governor and Jennicom. In a few seconds the situation had gone from bad to worse, and it could take but little more to bring an ugly rush upon the baronet and his companions.

"That racketing fellow Quills is the ringleader—he's at the bottom of every disturbance of the peace," avowed the Governor. "I must put a stop to this," he added wrathfully, and leaning from the window he shouted at the top of his voice, but without effect. Apparently none saw or heard him.

"They're beginning to throw," exclaimed Jennicom. "Sir, unless we go quickly forth —— Ay, they've hit the seafaring man! Look, he draws! Surely he cannot mean to ——"

A sharp report rang above the clamor of the crowd, and a puff of smoke curled upward. Captain Teague, struck smartly on the shoulder by a stone as large as his fist, had instantly turned, whipped a pistol from his belt, and discharged it.

A thrilling scene of violence, of smouldering passion fanned to an angry flame, immediately ensued; and incident followed incident so swiftly that Jennicom and the Governor, for the moment unable to tear themselves from the window, had witnessed the greater part of the affray before they thought of interfering. Though the Captain of the Marygold had fired harmlessly in the air, one might have supposed that he had drawn blood from the fury with which a dozen or more of the mob rushed upon him. The weapon was knocked out of his hand, brawny arms reached for him and dragged him away from his companions, and in a trice, in spite of his plucky

"DEFEND YOURSELF, SIR," HE CRIED

resistance, he was down beneath a rain of blows. Sir Lanslott, flashing steel from scabbard, would in his rage have attempted a rescue, had not Jeremy Quills run deftly in at him and seized his wrist. Fiercely they struggled for possession of the blade, and the King's deputy was losing his grip of it when assistance reached him from an unexpected quarter. For suddenly Rufus Jennicom sprang to his side and with two heavy strokes of his fist, put Master Quills flat on his back. Wresting the sword from the fallen man, the lad returned it to the baronet.

"Defend yourself, sir, but avoid bloodshed," he cried; and with that he hastened to Mistress Charmion, who was wringing her hands with fright and dismay. "Now is your chance," he told her. "Run to yonder house on the corner—'tis the Governor's."

"And leave my father in peril?" the girl exclaimed indignantly. "Canst think it, sir? Nay, I'll not stir without him. But oh, sir, save him from harm."

Her eyes tearfully appealed to Rufus, and a tiny hand, gloved and perfumed, unconsciously pressed his arm. For an instant he

wavered, uncertain what to do, the while seeing Sir Lanslott at bay with sword hissing in a half-circle, and catching a glimpse of the prostrate sea-captain struggling to rise. Jeremy was up again and approaching the lad with threats of vengeance. But just then, most opportunely, half-a-dozen soldiers came on the scene from the direction of the fort, closely followed by Jennicom and Governor Bradford, who had hurriedly rushed out of the house.

The crowd, realizing that they had carried their ill-feelings too far and fearing the consequences, began to disperse without delay, some in guilty haste, some slowly and sullenly. Jeremy Quills, among the last to withdraw, turned several times to shake his fist at Rufus.

Governor Bradford, making himself known to Sir Lanslott Charmion, put the best face possible on a sorry occasion.

"Words," said he, "can hardly soften the indignities you have suffered. Rather than this had happened I would have lost my right hand. The offenders, be assured, shall be brought to justice and properly punished."

"Nay, let it pass," replied the baronet, receiving the apology in a kindly spirit. "But indeed, sir," he added ruefully, "your people showed themselves most unfriendly, all save one. I refer to the lad standing yonder, whom I've had the pleasure of meeting before. Annis, didst see how prettily he laid that fellow on his back?"

"'Twas bravely done," said the girl, flashing a smile of gratitude at Rufus. "We are both greatly in his debt, father, and you should tell him so."

But it was already too late, for the lad, obeying a sharp word of command, had walked rapidly away by Jennicom's side. Sir Lanslott gazed after them curiously.

"An odd pair," he remarked. "I should never have taken them for father and son. The elder Jennicom hath a visage to turn wine to vinegar."

"A most worthy man," said Mr. Bradford, warmly. "One of our leading citizens."

Sir Lanslott shrugged his shoulders whimsically, rattled his blade into its scabbard, and with his companions set off to the Governor's

house, the musketeers forming an escort to right and left of the little party.

The sunset had faded to a topaz glow behind the dark barrier of the forest, and the cool, restful hour of twilight was shrouding and softening the harsh outlines of New Plymouth, when William Bradford, in hat and cloak, turned in at the open gate of Jennicom's palisade and found the old Puritan and his son sitting in the doorway of their house.

"Nay, I'll not cross the threshold," he replied to Jennicom's invitation. "My errand is a brief one. A word with you, Master Rufus—your conduct this afternoon was most laudable, proving that you've a cool head for an emergency, and it pleased me so highly that I've concluded to entrust you with an affair of state, so to speak. I wish to send a letter to Governor Vane, of Boston, in answer to one received from him this day. Will you undertake to bear it safely?"

"Is it your meaning, sir, that Plymouth is no place for me at present?" asked the lad. "If so, I would tell you that I am not afraid to account to my neighbors for

the courtesy shown to strangers in distress."

"Rufus, you forget yourself," Jennicom cried harshly.

"Nay, I admire his spirit," said the Governor. "But believe me, my boy, I had no such thought in mind. And yet 'twould be just as well, perhaps ——"

"He will do your bidding," interrupted Jennicom. "Speak, lad."

"I've no choice," Rufus answered quietly. "Since Governor Bradford honors me with his confidence, I shall be proud to carry the letter to Boston."

"Very good," replied the Governor, in a tone of relief. "'Tis settled then. Come to my house at seven o'clock to-morrow morning, in readiness to start. Mr. Vane's messenger will go back with you—he is a timid fellow, I've reason to fear, and less to be relied upon than yourself. If you've any word to send, Jennicom ——"

"A few lines to Nathaniel Brewster, which I'll write at once. He and his family will heartily welcome you to Boston, Rufus. 'Tis six months since you've seen them."

Jennicom walked as far as the gate with the Governor, who lingered there for a moment.

"'Twas easily arranged," said he, in a low voice, "and I trust your end will be gained. Ay, Sir Lanslott and his daughter have gone aboard their vessel for the night, though from to-morrow they will be my guests for a time. 'Tis my duty, you understand, to pay every respect to the King's envoy." He stepped out of the gate, then paused. "By-the-by," he added, "I'd forgotten a matter of interest to you, which I had from Captain Standish this morning. You remember that arrant knave Pybus Foulfoot, my bond-servant, who committed various misdemeanors two years ago, fled from the settlement, and ——"

"What of him?" Jennicom broke in, hoarsely. "He is dead—we know that."

"Nay, 'twas a false report reached us. It seems that the rogue drifted to the Penobscot trading-post last year under a different name, took part in the fighting there, and for some reason was not set free with the other prisoners. 'Tis said that the Chevalier D'Aunay still holds him captive at Port Royal, up on

the Bay of Fundy. Dead or alive, we're well rid of the fellow, for he'll never show his face at Plymouth again. Good-night, Jennicom —I'm keeping you out of bed."

"Good-night, sir."

The words were choked and husky, almost inaudible, forced with difficulty from Jennicom's parched throat. He stood with clenched hands, his body stiffened against the gate-post, looking after the Governor's receding figure, while a ghastly gray hue, closely akin to fear, might have been seen on his rigid face but for the friendly cloak of the twilight.

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH THERE'S A SECRET MEETING AND AN UNINVITED GUEST

From the first a touch of mystery hung about Carver Jennicom and roused a slight and transient curiosity. He was a Puritan to the backbone, and he had lived for two years among Puritans in Amsterdam, which Dutch port afforded a refuge to many English dissenters ere they emigrated to America; but such of these as crossed the Atlantic with him knew nothing of the man prior to his arrival in Holland.

"I'm from the south of England," the masterful new recruit told William Bradford, "and I formerly belonged to a small gathering of nonconformists—they've long since dispersed—who met secretly for worship in defiance of the law. So I've a common cause with your people, sir, and no higher wish but to share their lot, be what it may."

The Governor tactfully thrust no questions home, and thus Carver Jennicom, with his

little family, took up the burden of life at New Plymouth in the wintry season of 1623. The outer crust of the man masked finer feelings that few suspected. Two cherished aims guided his life. He strove zealously to help forward the good work which he saw already as the seed from which would spring a new nation, and he ardently prayed that his adopted child might from free choice follow in the same rugged, unswerving groove, and in after years help to shape the expanding destinies of the Puritan people.

Jennicom's experiment—'twas that he called it in his heart—bade fair to succeed. Rufus, grafted on an alien branch, thriving in the bleak climate of New England, grew up like a young and vigorous tree. At a tender age he was taught to run and swim, to handle firelock, sword, and quarter-staff, to sail a boat on the rough waters of the bay, and to tread the wilderness trails unerringly. His friends in those days and afterward were Rose and Humfrey Brewster, from whose father, the gentle Cambridge scholar, he imbibed in winter evenings as much learning as Jennicom thought to be good for him.

It was a rude and trying period, yet far from colorless or unromantic; a primitive, uncouth existence, when men earned their daily bread by the sweat of their brow, wore uncomely clothing and ate simplest food, dwelt in fortress-like houses of logs with oiled paper instead of window glass, blended religion with secular pursuits, and rarely stirred abroad without their weapons. An arduous bringing-up indeed for a lad, but young Rufus bore his part uncomplainingly, with a brave, contented spirit, because he knew no other world, no other conditions, nor even dreamed as yet of the wider life as different from his present one as day is from night.

On a pleasant July evening, as the sunset's afterglow was flushing sky and water with many soft hues of color, two lads and a girl, who had strolled northwards along the edge of Boston's harbor, were resting in a quiet, secluded nook of rocks and scrubby bushes, near to the gaunt-ribbed skeleton of a vessel, half-buried in sand, that had come to grief in a storm two years before. Hardy young progeny of the New World, comrades and playmates since childhood, were the three. Humfrey

Brewster, a slight, wiry lad in his nineteenth year, with his father's dark and pensive cast of features, was idly tossing pebbles into the water, while Rufus Jennicom, propped on an elbow, gazing earnestly, with a far-away look in his eyes, at a cluster of shipping moored off the town front—was dreaming of the strange and distant lands, of the teeming life of the older world, that the sight of these ocean wanderers suggested to him. A few feet apart from her companions sat Rose Brewster, and very happily named was this sweet little Puritan maiden of seventeen, with the bloom of the wild rose on her fair oval face, with her lavish tresses of hair, that the breeze had loosened, shading from spun gold to sunny nut-brown. Demurely clad in gray with a close white ruff about her slender throat, like the plumage of a dove, she made a dainty picture as she watched, with half-parted lips, the purple twilight stealing shoreward in the wake of the vanished sun.

"How beautiful it is!" she exclaimed. "Look! those far islands seem to be melting into the rim of the ocean. Yet I think I cared more for Plymouth harbor, and the bay

beyond it, than I do for the sea at Boston. I wish I were you, Rufus, though of course I am sorry you are going home to-morrow. Perhaps Mistress Charmion will have returned, and you will see her again. Tell me, was she very, very lovely? I saw her but once when she came to Boston, and that at a distance."

"Well, she was like a picture—that's all I know," Rufus answered vaguely, as he turned from the contemplation of the ships and sat up. "Looked as if a puff of wind would blow her away. A pretty butterfly, and as bright-colored as one. And yet she had a man's courage."

"And what finery did she wear, Rufus?"

"Oh, how can I remember?" laughed the lad. "There were gloves—long ones reaching to her elbows, and a wide hat with a plume that curled finely, and—and ——"

"And what?" urged Rose. "Pray tell me more."

"Rufus don't want to talk about girls," Humfrey interjected, in a scornful tone.

"But I'm sure he is glad to return to Plymouth," Rose said slyly.

"I'm not," vowed Rufus. "Anything but glad."

He shook his head decidedly, and meant it. It was true that Carver Jennicom had sent for him, but he was in no haste to leave Boston, where, though the day's toil was much the same, there were compensations—renewal of old friendships, dipping into well-nigh forgotten books with Nathaniel Brewster, the discovery that life held wider interests, beat with a quicker pulse, in the capital of the Bay Colony.

"No, I would rather stop here," he added, after a pause. "But I don't mind so much, since Humfrey is going back with me for a fortnight."

"For which Master Jennicom is to be thanked," spoke up Humfrey. "'Twas the pressing invitation in his letter that won my father's consent."

"Ah, me," said Rose, with a sigh and a pout. "I shall be all alone. There will be no more pleasant walks together in the evenings." She sprang suddenly to her feet. "Come, 'tis nearly dark," she cried.

Challenging her companions to a race, she

darted by them and ran with the grace and speed of a fawn. Humfrey and Rufus gave pursuit, but lost sight of the slim, gray-clad figure by the time they reached the market-place. Here they stopped to see the finish of an altercation between two sailors, and were moving on again when a man came up to them and addressed them in an undertone. Rufus recognized Jarvis Story, a former inhabitant of Plymouth.

"There's to be some preaching," said he mysteriously. "Yonder at my house. D'you wish to attend for a half-hour? I know you for discreet lads, else I had let you pass by."

"We're for home," replied Humfrey.

"As you like," replied Master Story. "But the preacher is one who will please you both. I warrant you'll be glad to see and hear him."

"Not Roger Williams?" exclaimed Rufus.

"Ay, that same. 'Tis not to be mentioned openly, you understand;" and Master Story put a finger to his lips. "He's in Boston for the night, on his way south," he added. "'Twill be a quiet meeting, and the magistrates none the wiser. But I'll say no more if you're reluctant to ——"

"I should like to hear him," interrupted Rufus. "What think you, Humfrey?"

Humfrey, with slight hesitation, owned to a similar wish. Both lads had known Roger Williams during his several sojourns in Plymouth, and were numbered among the many secret admirers of that lovable but erratic preacher of Salem. So in the end they yielded, though they could not quite stifle the uneasy voice of conscience, nor banish the prospect of Nathaniel Brewster's displeasure, as they followed Jarvis Story across the market-place, keeping a discreet distance behind him.

It was now quite dark, and for the most part the good people of Boston were within doors. Attracting little or no attention as they went through the streets, the three presently came to a palisaded house just beyond the western verge of the town, and being admitted by a man who was guarding the gate, they passed into a small, dimly-lit room where were assembled nearly a score of solemn visaged men and women, attired in dingy homespun and white ruffs and coifs.

Rufus and Humfrey slipped quietly to the rear of the little audience, and scarcely a minute later Roger Williams appeared from an adjoining room. But little more than a youth, slimly made and with a sweet and earnest countenance, was this young Welshman, who had first abandoned a career at the bar under the great Lord Coke, and then the offer of church preferment, in order to enjoy liberty of conscience and belief in New England. Since his arrival in 1631, he had bred discord and dissension by his heresies and law-defying doctrines, and yet had been tolerated, had time and again disarmed even his enemies, by reason of his gentle, even-tempered nature.

He began to speak at once, and the low eloquent tones, the winning face and magnetic voice, held the assemblage spellbound. Necks were craned forward, hands were lifted to ears, and rugged features showed the play of inward emotion and enthusiasm.

"And even here," he went on, toward the close of his brief discourse, "here in this great, primitive wilderness, where ye are sowing by stress and toil that others may reap, where

absolute freedom is in the very air ye breathe, the old fetters, the old clogs, gird ye about still. Deny it who can. At heart ye are no longer of the Church of England, and yet ye dare not break with it openly, like your brethren of Plymouth. Your charter is threatened, and behold ye fly to arms and vow to shed blood in defense of your rights. What rights, forsooth? Your charter was never worth the parchment 'twas written on. How can the King give, and ye profess to hold, that which belongs to neither? For the Indians, and they alone, are the owners of this whole land. And again," he paused to add force to the words, "what are ye but slaves to your magistrates? Rightful power they have over a man's body and goods, in respect of such laws as are just. But whence comes their authority when they dictate what ye are to believe and in what forms ye shall worship God. My deluded friends, it does not exist. I tell you earnestly ——"

"Roger Williams, I charge you in the King's name to hold your peace," interrupted a stern, ringing voice; and all eyes turned to the open doorway, where stood youthful Harry

Vane, Governor of the Bay Company, with grave displeasure on his flushed and handsome face.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH RUFUS BRAVES THE GOVERNOR'S WRATH

A DEEP, tense silence, that lasted for a few seconds, fell on the room. The Governor's eyes swept the congregation, but failed to detect Rufus and Humfrey, who stood trembling in a dusky corner with a group of broad-shouldered Puritans in front of them.

"He is not alone," whined Jarvis Story. "Alack, we are betrayed."

"Nay, but the worshipful Governor means us no ill," cried Mistress Anne Hutchinson, who was among those present. "Surely he will not interfere with a lawful and harmless meeting."

"Zounds! but this is too much," exclaimed the young chief magistrate. "And from you, madam, to whom I've so often shown favor and forbearance in excess of prudence. A lawful and harmless meeting indeed! If I rightly named it ——"

His voice was lost in a sudden murmur of consternation, a restless shuffling of feet, which as quickly ceased when Roger Williams stretched forth his arms appealingly.

"Sir, by your leave," said he, "I protest that I've done no wrong. I respectfully claim the right of free speech."

"Free speech!" cried the Governor. "Rank sedition and heresy, you mean. Rebellious and treasonable utterance. And this in spite of repeated and kindly warnings. I'll have no more of it, Master Williams. It must be stopped once and for all, else am I false to my oath of office and my duty to King and people."

"We are supposed to be in a free land, sir. I deny that I've uttered one treasonable or seditious word."

"Why, I heard you. But enough ——"

"Will you consent to argue the question in a calm and dispassionate spirit, sir?"

"I'll argue nothing. You will at once disperse this assemblage and give me the pleasure of your company."

"If you will but hear me ——"

"Not another word," thundered the Governor, losing his temper at last; and just then

the tall figure of his deputy, John Winthrop, the elder, appeared in the doorway.

"More firmness is needed, sir," he cried. "With your permission I'll arrest this contumacious fellow."

The deputy's harsh threat, and the gleam of a soldier's headpiece behind him, swiftly put an end to vacillation. Against his wishes Roger Williams was bundled into the adjoining room by two of his friends, and at the same instant Master Story knocked down and extinguished the light that stood over the fireplace. Clamor and confusion followed as the frightened people, plunged in utter darkness, with one accord endeavored to escape. Through the midst of them pushed the Governor and his deputy, meaning to apprehend the missing preacher, but a hastily-barred door frustrated their intentions, and turned them back again. Meanwhile the soldier—there was only the one—had been borne off his feet by the rush, and lying prostrate across the outer threshold of the room, unable to rise in spite of his frantic struggles, he continued to bawl for help at the top of his voice as the dispersing audience

trampled him underfoot, though he could scarcely be heard amid the shrieking of women and the hoarse shouting of men.

The two lads played no part in this unseemly scuffle, for directly the light was extinguished Rufus, with ready presence of mind, had whispered an encouraging word in Humfrey's ear and then guided him along the wall to a near-by window. Some little time was required to find and draw the bolt, which done, they flung the shutter wide and leaped over the sill to the ground.

They were among the first to dart through the gateway in the palisade, and without stopping to see the end of the trouble, or waiting to pick up any of their late companions, they made off at full speed across the town. Breathless and exhausted, they paused at length by the edge of the market-place, vastly relieved to have come out of an awkward scrape so easily. In the distance a faint hue and cry was spreading, but as yet the alarm had gone no farther. The immediate neighborhood was dark, lonely, and silent.

"'Tis lucky the Governor never saw us,"

said Humfrey, as they set off again, "for he'll be seeking to punish those who were at the meeting."

"Shall you tell your father we were there?" asked Rufus.

"Why not?"

"I didn't mean that. We'll have to tell him, of course. But I'm afraid he will be angry."

"It can't be helped," replied Humfrey. "Let's hurry home and get it over. Why don't you walk faster? Haven't you recovered your wind yet?"

"I should like to go back," said Rufus, "to find out if Roger Williams got away or not. It would be a burning shame if they caught him and put him in jail."

"Or if they expelled him from the colony. There is serious talk of it."

"They wouldn't dare do that," Rufus asserted vehemently. "Everybody likes Roger Williams—even the magistrates. And what wrong has he done? Humfrey, what he said to-night was true, every word of it. That's the kind of leader the people of these colonies need—a leader to show them the

difference between freedom and oppression, to drag them out of themselves, to force them to act and speak as if they had souls of their own. Religion was never intended to make life gloomy and slavish, but here in Boston, and in Plymouth and Salem and everywhere else ——"

"Rufus!" his friend exclaimed in surprise. "Why, what's come over you?"

"Oh, I mean it. Roger Williams has opened my eyes. What is our precious charter worth, after all, if the magistrates can send men to the pillory and the whipping-post because they refuse to go to church? Is that the way to make them good Christians? No! If I were a man, Humfrey, and had power ——"

"Hush! some one may hear you."

"I don't care. I would say the same to the Governor's face, though until to-night I've been among his most loyal admirers."

At the moment, it so happened, the lads were passing by the residence of Governor Vane. And Rufus, looking up, saw against the dusky gloom the standard of England hanging over the massive timbered gateway.

A sudden impulse, conceived in a spirit of rash enthusiasm, seized and conquered him. In a trice he had climbed nimbly to the top of the beams, where, balanced straddlewise, he drew a knife from his pocket, held the banner taut while he made a couple of quick slashes, and tore bodily from it the red cross of St. George. Springing to the ground he flaunted the trophy in his companion's face.

"What have you done?" cried Humfrey, in a horrified tone. "You're surely mad, Rufus. This may cost you your ears, if no worse."

Rufus, instantly sobered and brought to his senses, realized the desperate folly he had committed and the consequences that might ensue.

"I—I must have been mad," he said miserably. "'Twas done before I had time to think. We had better get away from here as quickly as possible."

"You'll not take that with you?"

"No; I'll drop it over the wall. Wait a second——"

"Run! run!" exclaimed Humfrey. "We're discovered."

Even as he spoke the gate flew open, and out leaped a man wearing the long cloak that was the badge of the Governor's service.

"Rogues, varlets, I've caught ye in the act!" he shouted; and with that he overtook Rufus and clapped both arms around him from behind.

Humfrey could easily have escaped, but instead he turned back to the assistance of his companion, and attacking the man from the rear he pulled him heavily to the ground by the shoulders. Rufus came down as well, and the next instant he had jerked himself free and was on his feet, leaving the square of crimson cloth in the grasp of his captor. The rescue was effected in less than half a minute from the throwing open of the gate, and as both lads took to their heels, plunging across the gloomy square, the Governor's baffled serving-man made the night ring with lusty clamor, which was not long in waking a response.

"They'll give hot pursuit," panted Humfrey, "and you know what it means if we're caught. This way—not toward home."

"But 'twas too dark for the fellow to have recognized us," said Rufus.

"We can't be sure of it, so 'tis best to take no chances. Faster—I'll keep up with you. Now bear to the left."

Most of the people of Boston were abed, and others had been drawn westward by the tumult in the direction of Jarvis Story's house, else the young fugitives might not have got far from the Governor's gateway. But the odds were all in their favor, and without interference, without meeting a single person, they ran on through the deserted, grass-grown streets, while the hue and cry spread and gained vigor behind them. Holding to the northeast they presently reached the edge of the town, and several minutes later they crept into a thicket of scrubby bushes not many yards from the spot where they had been sitting with Rose Brewster earlier in the evening. Exhausted, gasping hard for breath, they threw themselves on the sand.

"Well, I've landed you in a pretty mess," Rufus said glumly, when he was able to speak. "'Twas all my fault, and I'm more than sorry, Humfrey. You should have disappeared

when you heard that sneaking fellow fumbling at the gate."

"And left you to be hauled off to jail? Why, I'd have turned back in the face of the Governor's whole household, right or wrong. But 'twas a most reckless deed, Rufus."

"Sheer madness, my good Humfrey. In truth, I hardly know what spurred me to it. I chanced to look up, and there was the standard mocking me, flaunting the injustice of the magistrates before my very eyes. D'you understand how I felt?"

"I begin to see why Roger Williams's teachings are said to be dangerous and inflammable," Humfrey replied, laying a hand on his friend's shoulder. "But enough of reproaches. 'Tis useless to talk of what's done and over, and can't be mended. The question that concerns us at the moment is whether 'twill be safe or not to go home. They may be watching the house."

"Nay, I'll not believe it," vowed Rufus. "The Governor's knave, I would swear, identified neither of us."

"Nor could I do as much for him," admitted Humfrey. "His features were only a

blur in the darkness. I wish 'twas this time to-morrow, and we were well on the way to Plymouth."

"We must think of to-night first," said Rufus. "How long are we to lie here in hiding?"

"Until we're satisfied that we can safely venture forth," was the reply. "And that will not be yet awhile."

Humfrey was right. From all quarters of the town could be heard a confused noise of shouting and calling, which at intervals drew an echo from some vessel lying in the harbor. But the pursuit happily trailed no nearer, though it was a considerable time—quite an hour—before the tumult ebbed to a peaceful silence. A few minutes longer the lads waited, then left their shelter and set off to enter the town by a roundabout route.

"'Tis past eleven, at the least," said Humfrey. "I wonder if we'll find the door barred."

"No fear," Rufus answered grimly. "Your father will be sitting up for us."

They followed the curving line of the shore, moving warily and vigilantly, with anxious

hearts and uneasy consciences. None challenged them, no dreaded watchman loomed out of the murky darkness, and at length they slipped into the town by a rutted cart-track that brought them to the palisade of Humfrey's home.

The gate was unfastened, and they saw a yellow ray of light streaming from the chinks of a shuttered window. Mustering courage, they strode across the garden and let themselves into the house, where Nathaniel Brewster, who was seated by a table, rose to confront them with a sober, searching glance.

"What kept you so late?" he demanded.

"We went to the meeting at Master Story's," Humfrey boldly answered.

"I suspected as much," his father replied, in a hard voice. "Rash, imprudent youths! 'Twas a dangerous and foolish thing to do, as you should have known, and it merits a severe punishment. Ever since, I suppose, you've been hiding in fear of the consequences. But surely the Governor did not see you there?"

"I think not, sir," Rufus spoke up. "We

were in a corner of the room behind some of the others."

"I am grieved and shocked," said Nathaniel Brewster, with a sigh. "It is well that you will be absent from Boston for a time, until this night's work is partly forgotten. Roger Williams is a fugitive, wandering in the forest to avoid arrest, for the magistrates will tolerate his perverse conduct no longer. Nor do I blame them. Scarcely was the unlawful meeting dispersed when some wicked persons, inflamed by the seditious speech to which they had listened, cut the cross of St. George from the standard that hangs over the Governor's gateway. The report of this most dastardly outrage I had from his own lips, not a quarter of an hour ago."

"Was Governor Vane here?" Humfrey and Rufus cried in one breath.

"Ay, he honored me with a visit," replied Nathaniel Brewster, failing to observe the ill-concealed agitation of the lads. "He brought a letter, with the request that it be forwarded to Governor Bradford at once, since he was aware that you were leaving for Plymouth tomorrow. I deliver it into your zealous

charge, Master Jennicom;" and he handed Rufus a small sealed packet, on which the ink seemed barely dry, addressed to William Bradford. "You little deserve such a mark of confidence," he added sternly. "Be off to bed now, for 'twill be wise to start at an early hour. I will speak with you further in the morning."

"We're well out of that scrape," said Humfrey, as they reached their own room. "I hope we've heard the last of it."

He put the light on a shelf, and was standing by the open gable-window, enjoying the touch of the cool air on his flushed cheeks, when a sharp exclamation caused him to turn quickly round.

"What's wrong?" he cried.

"My knife!" Rufus answered hoarsely, as he searched his pockets for the second time. "I must have dropped it when I was on the Governor's gate, Humfrey—yes, 'tis gone, that's certain. And—and my initials are cut on the haft."

In mute consternation, their cheerfulness steeped in a trouble that was too bitter for words, the lads stared at each other.

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH WINGED DEATH PLAYS A TRAGEDY

THE day was breaking when the young travelers, wilderness-bound, parted from Humfrey's father and sister, who had accompanied them as far as the edge of the town. A little later, where the undulating patch of golden grain touched the borders of the pine-wood, they pulled up for a last retrospect of the scene they were leaving. Nathaniel Brewster, sunk as usual in reverie, neither paused nor turned, but Rose fluttered at intervals a white kerchief, which dainty signal the lads recognized by waving their hats; they watched until the two were quite concealed by a line of palisading, and then, Rufus astride of the old, raw-boned black horse, and Humfrey walking by his side with shouldered firelock, they plunged into the dark, dense shade of the trees, with their backs toward Boston and their faces set for the distant goal that beckoned across leagues of barbarous wilderness.

"Free as birds!" exclaimed Humfrey, drawing a deep, full breath. "I was afraid we wouldn't get away, Rufus. My heart is down where it belongs again. It's been sticking in my throat half the night, and ever since breakfast, for fear of a visit from old Blades the constable. But what do you suppose became of that knife? Surely, if you had dropped it at the gate——"

"I think it fell into the Governor's garden and may be lying under the shrubbery," said Rufus, "or else it slipped out of my pocket when we were hiding by the shore."

"It's safe enough if you lost it there."

"Yes, if I did. But we don't know that. If the knife is in the garden it will be picked up some time."

"Well, it hasn't been found yet, that much is pretty certain," replied Humfrey. "As father says, 'don't look for trouble till trouble looks for you,' so I'm not going to worry any longer. And you needn't either."

Their course was a mere thread of a trail, shadowy and vague, blazed in some places by an axe and elsewhere to be read only by keen eyesight and intuition. And nearly midway

on this little-traveled path, eighteen miles from Boston and about twenty-two from Plymouth, lived the man who had created it.

Here, deep in the wilderness, Caleb Stagg had built himself a home several years before. He was a widower with a pair of grown sons, and stood in the relationship of uncle to Mistress Comfort Brewster, who was in the habit of sending him from time to time, by any means that offered, such staple articles as he might be in need of. Wherefore we find Rufus and Humfrey following the longer route to Plymouth, by which they would break their journey for a night and deliver to Caleb Stagg the powder and ball, the axe-heads and venison pasties, that Black Betty, Nathaniel Brewster's old mare, carried in her bulging saddle-bags.

The trail was rugged and progress slow. Weird silence and gloom pervaded the fastness of the infinite greenwood, and a glimpse of a startled bear galloping across a sunlit glade, when the lads stopped for a bite of lunch by a wayside stream, was the only incident of an uneventful day. Each riding in turn they came toward evening to the lonely

cabin with its strong palisade and loopholed walls, and received a hearty welcome from the settler and his two sons, Jonas and Reuben, who eagerly besought news of the outer world, and were most reluctant to let their visitors depart on the following morning. The weather had changed during the night. The sky was overcast with low, leaden clouds, and a wind from the east stirred the tree-tops.

"There's a storm brewing," said Caleb Stagg, as he left the lads at the edge of the cultivated ground, "and 'tis uncertain how long it will hold off. 'Twere better to have tarried, but I'll not urge you, since you're set on reaching Plymouth to-day. You'll be wise to travel quickly. The trail is easily followed, if you keep watch for the blazed trees. Farewell, and God speed you."

He turned back to the house, striding between the yellow grain that nodded for the sickle, while behind him the hoof-beats grew fainter and fainter on the turf.

"We've got plenty of time," said Rufus, "and I half believe 'twill clear by and by."

"Looks a bit like it," assented Humfrey. "Do you know, I've been thinking that

Black Betty won't be much use if the path gets any worse than it was yesterday. We could go faster without her."

"But you'll want the mare to carry you back to Boston."

"Ay, that's true, Rufus, else I should have left her with Uncle Caleb. However, rough road or smooth, I doubt not but we'll sit down to supper with Master Jennicom this night. You've the Governor's letter safe?"

"'Tis betwixt shirt and doublet," Rufus replied, "and the waxen seal presses like a button."

They pushed steadily on their winding way. Occasionally a glint of sunshine, filtering through the clouds, sustained the hopes that were destined to come to naught; for early in the afternoon, when the lads were some distance beyond the spot where they had eaten the noonday meal, the threatened storm broke almost without warning; first a dead calm and a swift blackening of the sky, then a sizzle of tiny drops, and next a hard, relentless downpour that woke a thousand murmurous little noises in the forest.

"I wish it had held off a few hours longer,"

said Humfrey, ruefully. "How far do you suppose we are from Plymouth?"

"Ten or a dozen miles," Rufus answered. "We must go faster."

This they were able to do for a mile or more, by which time, the storm having increased in violence, they found themselves in difficulties. The rain, driven by a high wind that swept with a continuous roar through the trees, lashed and stung their faces, half-blinding them at times. Twice they missed the trail, but happily discovered it close by. The sodden grass, concealing roots and stones, became dangerous footing. Black Betty slipped, shooting Humfrey into a hazel copse, and after that he walked, leading the mare by the bridle.

"We're not making much headway," said Rufus, "but we have some hours of daylight left, and even at this slow pace we ought to reach Plymouth long before dark."

"I'd give a good bit to be there now," replied Humfrey. "I don't like the idea of spending a night in the wilderness, exposed to the storm, but if we blunder off the trail again—hark! what was that? Do you hear it?"

"Only the wind, surely."

"'Tis never that, Rufus. Ugh! it makes my flesh creep."

They paused for a moment, and Rufus could not repress a shudder as he listened to the strange, uncanny noises that agitated the distant depths of the forest—the wailing, sobbing sounds, rising now and again to a long-drawn shriek, that had nothing in common with the whistle of the gale, the roar of brimming streams, or the voice of man or beast. A cold, icy touch ran down his spine.

"There! it has stopped," exclaimed Humfrey. "But it will begin again presently."

"'Twas naught to alarm us," declared Rufus. "We deserve to be well laughed at for yielding to such stupid fears. Why, Humfrey, we're no better than two babes in the wood."

The wind had dropped a little, though the rain still poured with steady, soaking persistency. Drenched to the skin, with their firelocks partly wrapped round with greased cloths and furthermore protected by the folds of their cloaks, the lads struggled on in the face of increasing disadvantages, slipping and

sliding, floundering amid oozy, squashing mud, dashing the water from their eyes to peer right and left beneath the dripping boughs and thickets. The trail, mired like a cattle-track, splashed with glistening pools, grew more and more difficult to follow. Elusively, with almost baffling cunning, it crept up hill and down, threaded dismal hollows and ravines, dived between serried thickets and frowning masses of bowlders, crossed shallow streamlets, and skirted the quaking edges of alder and willow bog.

"We're crawling at a snail's pace, little more," panted Humfrey, breathless from pulling the reluctant horse over a marshy spot. "I'm afraid there's no chance of seeing Plymouth to-night."

A forbidding hilltop, granite-ribbed and crowned with moaning pines, was won by hard effort. The farther slope dipped to a swollen torrent, and having forded this at some risk, and groped through a half-mile of dense, level timber, the lads emerged on a scene of devastation wrought by one of nature's titanic forces. Twenty, perhaps a score of years before, a hurricane had swept by here, leveling the trees,

in a wide, even swath, like so many ten-pins. The gap was a hundred yards across, and stretched far to right and left. Stunted bushes, seemingly loth to thrive in this graveyard of the forest, waved above the moss that carpeted the open spaces. No flowers bloomed and shed fragrance, no bright-colored berries or fruits lent a note of relief.

Buffeted by the wind, glancing furtively roundabout, the lads pursued Caleb Stagg's trail, which zigzagged ahead of them in most erratic fashion, and was none too easily perceived. They were beyond the middle of the leveled belt when Rufus halted in evident perplexity and turned to his companion.

"What's to be done now, Humfrey? The path, d'you see, appears to end."

"Why, so it does," Humfrey assented. "Or else the rain has washed all signs of it from the moss and leaves. But if we hold a straight course we're sure to ——"

A shrill, frightened exclamation choked the sentence on his lips. A feathered arrow, winging a swift and hissing flight, had buried half its length in the throat of the mare, who gave one frantic plunge that tore the bridle from

Humfrey's hand, then sank to her knees and rolled heavily over on her side.

Save for that, and the drip of the rain, the silence was as before. For a moment, in the presence of this quiet little tragedy, the lads were stupefied and helpless from sheer incredulous horror. The missile had soared down the clearing from the west, but their quick, sweeping glance in that direction showed nothing rising to view, nothing stirring amid the root-mounds and low bushes. Then a second arrow, singing viciously by Humfrey's ear, roused both to a keen and tangible sense of their danger.

"Indians!" cried Rufus. "Run! We must get away from here. Nay, don't waste a charge on the horse," as he struck aside the barrel of Humfrey's weapon. "She will be out of her misery in a few seconds."

"Poor Betty! I wish I had left her at home," Humfrey exclaimed, swallowing a sob of anger and distress.

He darted after Rufus, and they ran like deer, bending low, among the fallen trunks and branching roots, holding a little to the southeast as they crossed the rest of the storm-

razed belt. A third arrow overtook them ere they reached the borders of the forest, but of this Rufus was ignorant until, when they had plunged into the deep, greenish shade, Humfrey displayed his hat with a flint-tipped hickory-dart piercing the crown through and through.

"Look!" he gasped. "'Twas whisked off my head—I barely caught it. And 'tis a Pequot arrow."

"Art sure of that?"

"I know the make—'tis feathered from the wing of a redbird."

"The Pequots hate the English," said Rufus, "and, if you're right, the scoundrel who seeks our lives is probably on some evil errand to the tribe of Wampanoags. There may be more than one, else I should try to match his strategy. But 'twill be wiser to keep in flight till night is at hand and we can no longer be followed."

"And d'you expect meanwhile to conceal our tracks from an Indian's eyesight?" Humfrey asked incredulously.

"I'll do the best I can," Rufus replied, "and I think I know a little about it, un-

less I've forgotten what I learned of woodcraft."

He added a few instructions as they sped on, threading their way among the sombre brown trunks of the trees, leaping grass and copse, and planting their feet lightly on the carpet of moss and pine-needles. Coming to a brook they waded a hundred yards down the brawling channel, leaving it finally to climb a steep bank of rocks. Thus, for the better part of an hour, they continued their flight through the recesses of the vast forest, pausing frequently to watch and listen, then hurrying forward again with renewed courage, but ever with the spectre of the stricken and dying mare before their eyes. At length, after circling round to the farther side of a boggy alder-swamp, they crawled deep into a cavernous thicket and there flung themselves to the ground, breathless and spent, sheltered from the rain that beat monotonously on the canopied leaves and twigs overhead.

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH BLACK BETTY IS WELL AVENGED

For a long time the lads kept anxious vigil, starting at every slight sound, not trusting themselves to speak above a whisper or to stir from their crouching attitudes save with the utmost caution. A couple of hours must have passed thus before they felt any measure of confidence, and then, emboldened by the silence, they stretched their cramped limbs and crawled on hands and knees to within a few feet of the mouth of the thicket. They looked on a sparsely-timbered glade, no more than a dozen yards wide, that was girt about by brake and coppice. The summer afternoon was drawing near its close, and signs of better weather, of a permanent break-up of the storm, were not lacking. The rain had ceased, and the wind blew fresh and keen from another point of the compass. Westward, behind a boldly-jutting knoll, a rift in the scurrying clouds showed saffron-pink with the glow of the sinking sun.

"We had better lie here till darkness, don't you think?" asked Humfrey.

"Nay, I'm for pushing on at once," Rufus replied. "We are clearly in a vast swamp, to cross which we'll need what is left of the daylight. As for our enemy, why I'll warrant we've outwitted him at his own game. The stream would have checked him, if he followed us so far as that."

"Well, then, let us be starting, if only to seek a dryer camping-place. Our bed must be in the boughs of a tree, where wild animals can't reach us. We won't dare light a fire."

"Nor shall we need one, I trust," said Rufus. "Look you, Humfrey, the lost trail will be off to our right, westward, and since we are no more than eight or nine miles from Plymouth we shall very shortly pick up the lower bridle-path by bearing in a south-easterly course."

"And what then?"

"We'll hold to it by the aid of pine-wood torches, unless the moon gives sufficient light. It should be up this evening if the sky clears."

A moment later, having crept out of the

thicket, they stood gazing sharply about while they unwrapped the greased cloths from their pieces. They were on the point of setting off, little dreaming of danger, when a faint, rustling noise close by gave them a fright. Turning to the bushes on the right, they were horrified to see two feathered and painted redskins glide forth with catlike tread, their eyes glued to the trail they were unerringly pursuing.

Hunters and hunted, separated by no more than a dozen paces, discovered one another in the same instant. The foremost Indian, who carried an arrow ready fitted to his bow, swiftly drew and let fly, and hard on the twang of the deer sinew came a jet of flame, a crashing report, as Rufus discharged his leveled firelock. A yell punctuated the echoes of the hills, and through the scattering, bluish smoke the savage loomed dimly for half a second, reeling and staggering, ere he fell heavily forward on his face. His companion had turned and fled, and was already lost to sight.

"We must have the other one," Rufus cried hoarsely, "else he will dog us like a

panther. Quick, Humfrey — why, you're hit!"

"'Tis a mere scratch," replied Humfrey, whose mouth, drawn with pain, belied his words. He clutched an arrow that was sticking in his left arm, and resolutely tore it from the wound, tip and all. "'Twill give no further trouble," he vowed. "It was aimed for my breast, but I dodged it timely. On with you, Rufus. I'll follow."

They leaped by the prostrate, motionless redskin, and bursting through the coppice they emerged on a larger strip of open ground, across which lay a desolate, far-reaching level of brackish pools glistening dull-green, stunted trees shivering in the wind and patches of thin soil dappled with yellow and purple flowers. By the borders of the swamp were clumps of low bushes, and behind one of these the fugitive savage, whose original purpose was doubtless to get to the rear of the lads by a wide detour, had on second thoughts taken refuge. His crouching form was invisible, but his feathered headdress nodded above the twigs and betrayed him.

"There he is!" shouted Rufus. He stopped to reload his piece, his eyes flashing with eagerness, his hot young blood fired by the newly-wakened lust for warfare. An arrow, whistling viciously from cover, tore through a flapping fold of his cloak. He moved to the shelter of a fallen tree and went on loading with hurried fingers.

"I believe I can hit the fellow," exclaimed Humfrey, as he somewhat reluctantly put his musket to his shoulder.

"Nay, he's dropped lower now, and you'd surely miss him," protested Rufus. "He wishes nothing better than to draw your charge, and thus have us at his mercy. I'll be ready in a second or two, and meanwhile do you keep yonder stone in front of you."

Humfrey crawled to the indicated spot. The concealed savage, whom Rufus had rightly credited with a desire to draw the fire of his enemies, several times poked into view what was probably a bunch of feathers fastened to one end of his bow. The ruse failing, he let drive three arrows in quick succession. They whizzed very near the mark and struck a little to the rear.

"I don't like this," grumbled Humfrey. "We'll be hit directly we rise. The rogue isn't showing an inch of himself, and I'm not sure that he is still behind the same bush."

"We're not going to rise," said Rufus, as he finished charging his piece and dropped some powder into the pan. "We must match cunning against cunning. I'm ready now. Work round to the left, creeping as flat as you can, while I bear in the opposite direction. The one who gets the first glimpse ——"

"I see him," shouted Humfrey. "There, he's off!"

Both lads sprang to their feet. The Indian, judging that by this time the empty musket was recharged, and finding himself in a tighter place than he had bargained for, had suddenly made a start in the direction that offered the best chance of escape—straight across the swamp. He ran like a deer, bounding lightly over the quivering soil, nor slackened speed when Humfrey's firelock spoke with a crashing roar.

"You've missed him," exclaimed Rufus.

"Ay, the piece kicked and threw the charge too high. 'Tis your turn—be quick."

Rufus lifted his weapon and took careful aim, then lowered the barrel. "I can't do it," he cried. "I can't shoot the poor wretch in cold blood. Let him go—he deserves his life."

"But 'twill be unsafe to spare him," suggested Humfrey.

"Ay, so it will. We must think of ourselves. And yet——"

Intently they watched the fleeing figure, Rufus still hesitating, loth to fire. And the next instant fate, by an unexpected stroke, took the choice out of his hands. A dense clump of trees and undergrowth, some thirty yards out in the swamp, was the point the redskin was striving to reach. He was more than halfway to it, having safely leaped from islet to islet, from one grass-tussock to another, when he was confronted by a sheet of black, open water four or five yards wide. His footing was too precarious for delay, even had he been able to check himself on the brink. He was compelled to jump, and did so with such little impetus that he landed in the middle of the pool, where, submerged almost to his armpits, he stuck fast. He strained and

tugged, clutched at the empty air, but all in vain. Despite his desperate efforts to release himself he continued to sink deeper and deeper.

"He's a dead Indian," gasped Humfrey. "There's bottomless mud under him, and it's got tight hold of his feet and is sucking him down. He'll never get out."

"Perhaps we can help him," cried Rufus. "I hate to see him perish like that."

"'Tis useless. He's beyond aid."

"At least we can try. Quick, Humfrey!"

They hastened to the edge of the marsh, and running along a half-sunken log they leaped from it to a doubtful floating surface of intermatted roots and vegetation. But it was utterly impossible for them to reach or assist the luckless redskin, who was already submerged to the shoulders. Before their horrified gaze the fatal quagmire drew him down relentlessly, steadily, as if in the grip of some unseen aquatic monster. He ceased to struggle, meeting his doom with the strange stoicism of his race, and chanting a weird, guttural death-song until the greenish-brown waters choked his voice. They swiftly

mounted to his nostrils and eyes, closed at last above feathered scalp-lock and uplifted hands. The tragedy was over.

Sick at heart, white and trembling, the lads made their way back to firm ground. They were unnerved by the terrible scene, and the Indian's heroism had turned their enmity to pity and admiration. Humfrey, unable to conceal longer the pain he was suffering and the blood that trickled freely down his sleeve, bared his left arm and disclosed a ragged hole in the flesh, above the elbow. Rufus bathed the wound, and wrapped it tightly in a strip torn from his own shirt.

"That must do till we get to Plymouth," he said. "'Tis an ugly hurt, and you'll feel it more to-morrow."

"I feel it enough now," Humfrey answered ruefully, "but I've still got the use of the arm, and that's the main thing. Shall we take a look at the other redskin before we set off?"

"'Twould be just as well," Rufus assented, without relish.

They found the savage where he had fallen. Rufus, standing by the stiffening clay, regretted the fled soul while admitting the jus-

tice of the act. He had been reared amid stormy and turbulent times, and had seen human life taken more than once, but somehow this was different and stirred him deeply.

"You had to do it," said Humfrey, divining his friend's thoughts. "He meant to kill us. They were both Pequots, and that isn't as bad as if they had been Wampanoags or Narragansetts."

"'Tis bad enough," declared Rufus. "I should like to know what errand brought them so far from their own tribe, but that is likely to remain a mystery. 'Twas to secure our firelocks, no doubt, that they followed us up with such persistency and craft. There may have been a larger party, so it behooves us to put this fellow out of the way, and then seek the Plymouth trail with all speed."

"The wolves will devour him."

"Ay, in time. And meanwhile he shall lie in yonder thicket. Come, Humfrey, lend a hand."

The unpleasant task was soon accomplished. They carried the body several yards into their late hiding-place, and leaving it there in the dim shadows, with weapons and pipe to keep

it company, they hurriedly departed from the neighborhood, casting many a furtive and uneasy glance over their shoulders.

The riven clouds were scudding thickly across the heavens, affording glimpses of pale blue sky, and the glow on the western horizon, seen through the black tree-trunks, told how nearly the sun was down. It was necessary to make a considerable detour round the borders of the swamp, and this wasted so much time that when the lads finally got into an undulating pine-wood the twilight was closing in darkly. Since Humfrey had lost the tinder-box, containing flint and steel, they were deprived of the hoped-for guidance and protection of torches. They pushed on as well as they could, groping from tree to tree, wandering down the spectral aisles and glades of the forest, until the moon grew bright. A little later wolves began to howl at a great distance, and the cries of other prowling animals—some weird and unrecognizable—further disturbed the silence of the night.

"Shall we climb into a tree?" ventured Humfrey, anxiously.

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"Not unless we're compelled to," said Rufus. "We're traveling southeast right enough—I've got my bearings by the moon and stars—and if there's light enough to pick up the lower trail there ought to be light enough to follow it."

"We may have crossed it already."

"I don't think so. Lean on me when you're tired, Humfrey. Does the arm pain you much?"

"It throbs and burns," Humfrey replied, gritting his teeth as he jostled the injured limb against a sapling. "Never mind, I can stand it. What's that shining below us? Water?"

"I hope so," said Rufus, "for I'm badly in want of a drink."

They stumbled down the hill into the depths of the ravine, and parting a fringe of undergrowth found themselves by a stream that had gathered no little volume from the recent rains. Having slaked their thirst the lads beat along the edge of the flood, first in one direction and then in the other, searching, but without success, for an easy fording.

"It can't be very deep," said Humfrey,

"and 'tis no more than twenty yards across. I'll lead the way—a wetting won't hurt us."

"We'll get that, for sure," Rufus replied.

Holding his firelock high Humfrey stepped into the stream, which at once rose to his waist. He waded forward for several yards, gradually deeper, and then suddenly disappeared with a splash. Rufus was close behind, and without an instant's delay he plunged to the rescue. But there was no cause for alarm. Humfrey promptly shot to the surface, gasping and spluttering, treading water while he glanced over his shoulder.

"I'm all right," he cried. "We may as well go on now. We'll have to swim—there's no bottom yet."

Rufus overtook him by a spurt, and side by side they swam against the current, with cool, one-armed strokes. Their weapons impeded them somewhat, and they were carried a considerable distance down stream before they touched hard ground underfoot, from which point they waded leisurely ashore and shook themselves like two dripping dogs. The air was warm, and they felt little discomfort.

"A brisk run will put us in a glow," said

Rufus. "'Tis a pity about our firelocks. Mine was quite under water half the time."

"So was mine," replied Humfrey. "I hope we won't need them, for they're of no use in this condition. But what's to be done next?"

"Sure you're able to go on?" asked Rufus.

"As long as you are," was the dogged reply.

"Then we'll follow the course of the stream, and if we miss the two paths that cross it, why we'll just keep on to the coast."

Though the lads were beginning to feel fatigue—not to speak of Humfrey's wounded arm—in their defenseless condition anything was preferable to a night in the woods. For some time they traversed a rich bottom-land, heavily timbered, and then, having made the mistake of not keeping strictly to the edge of the stream, they suddenly discovered that they had lost it. They bore to the left, expecting every moment to see the gleam of water.

"It can't be far off," Humfrey said hopefully.

"Unless the channel has made a sharp turn," Rufus suggested, "and that's the only way to account for ——"

"Hark!" interrupted Humfrey, clutching at his companion's shoulder.

A whimpering, sobbing cry, pitched in a plaintive key, quavered most uncannily through the recesses of the forest. It came from no great distance to the rear of the lads, and they shuddered as they listened.

"What was that?" Humfrey added. "It sounded like a child in distress, but there can be none hereabouts."

"'Twas no child," Rufus said hoarsely. "Heaven help us, Humfrey. 'Tis a panther. The hungry beast is creeping on our trail, and I know not how we shall escape it."

"The stream ——"

"Ay, if we can find it again and swim to the other side, the panther would hardly follow. Come, 'tis our only chance."

Rufus did not exaggerate the danger. With damp and useless firelocks, otherwise unarmed save for their hunting-knives, the lads were at the mercy of this terrible pest of the wilderness, who would unhesitatingly have pursued them to the top of the highest tree. They fled madly, bruising their limbs as they tore through scrub and timber, straining their

eyes right and left for the flooded rivulet that meant so much to them. But the unbroken forest still stretched on all sides, the pallid moonlight filtering from the canopied boughs onto the grim and sombre trunks, and in their anxious hearts grew the conviction that they had lost their bearings and were going the wrong way.

At first there was an interval of silence, and this, while it continued, gave the lads some slight hope that the panther might not be following them. But the scrap of comfort was short-lived. Again they heard the plaintive, half-human cry sobbing to the night, twice repeated, and a little later, as the animal drew hotter on the scent, their blood was turned cold by angry, rasping screams that rang nearer and nearer. They plunged on blindly, at desperate speed, until wind and strength began to fail them. Rufus, looking back fearfully, caught a glimpse of a long, lithe form bounding across a glade not fifty yards behind. It vanished in the deep, interlying shadows, from which he knew the creature might spring at any moment now. He imagined he could hear a swift, muffled

patter on the moss and leaves. His flesh crept.

"'Tis almost up with us!" he panted. "Will we never reach the water? Faster, faster, Humfrey, for your life!"

He laid hold of his companion's arm, dragged him along. They ran a little farther, stumbling and staggering. Their pursuer screeched in their very ears, as it seemed, and at the same instant Humfrey tripped over a log and fell headlong.

"Leave me," he gasped, as Rufus tried to pull him to his feet, "I can't go—another—step."

"Lie still!" cried Rufus; and with that he faced round, swung his firelock in readiness for a smashing blow, and waited. Out from the black shadows, into a patch of sward silver-fretted by the glancing rays of the moon, glided the great panther. It paused for a moment, deterred by the brave lad's shouts, and the next instant leaped to within ten feet of him. There the beast crouched in the gloom, spitting and mewling with rage, a hideous, evil, shapeless thing with two eyes of burning green fire. It quivered, lashed

its tail, prepared to spring. And just then ——

"Stoop low!" whispered a strange, stern voice immediately behind Rufus; and as he obeyed the command, wondering and half-dazed, a jet of flame spurted over his head and a deafening roar nearly threw him off his feet. Through the drifting powder-smoke he vaguely saw the panther writhing, and tearing at the ground.

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH THE PLYMOUTH TRAIL YIELDS FURTHER ADVENTURE

THE pungent smoke sifted upward, and the last echoes of the firelock's crash reverberated into faraway silence. Humfrey rose, limping, from behind the log. Neither he nor Rufus quite realized their miraculous deliverance, so amazingly had it come about. With furtive mistrust they scanned the man who stood indistinctly revealed by their side, his attention fixed on the panther. The convulsive struggles were of brief duration. The twitching of the limbs ceased, and the tawny-gray body settled to the repose of death.

"Shingascung!"

The summons quickly brought, from what looked to be a dense coppice in the rear, a splendid, scantily-clad figure of an Indian. He carried aloft a blazing torch of pine-wood, and as the ruddy glare streamed full upon the half-frightened lads, the stranger with the firelock turned inquisitive, searching eyes

toward them. There was apprehension as well as curiosity in his glance.

"Who are ye that wander in the forest by night?" he asked curtly. "If you can give a good account of yourselves ——"

"Why, 'tis Master Williams!" cried Rufus and Humfrey in one breath, vastly relieved to recognize the grave, kindly face of their rescuer.

Roger Williams bent closer scrutiny on the lads, then, evidently as pleased as they, he greeted them warmly and by name.

"One must be careful in the wilderness," he said. "I did not know you at first, and small blame to me, since your cheeks are smudged with powder-grime. You've a story to tell, doubtless. That I've supplied a happy ending to it is my good fortune as well as yours. I heard the outcry, and arrived, 'twould seem, at a most fateful moment. Indeed, I'd scarcely time to take aim ——"

"'Twas a fine shot," broke in Rufus.

"It needed to be, for much hung upon it."

He spoke to the redskin, who threw the light of the torch on the dead panther. It was a huge animal, at least eight feet from tip

to tail, with a superb head and coat and thick, powerful paws. The heavy charge, entering its breast, had failed to kill it at once.

"There's one enemy of mankind the less," said Roger Williams. "And now, my young friends, will you step yonder to my poor abode? You're welcome to such hospitality as it affords."

He led the way to the farther side of what the lads had taken for a dense coppice, but which proved to be a group of large rocks closely piled together and screened about by bushes. Creeping through a narrow cleft that compelled them to stoop low, they were surprised to find themselves in a circular space of several yards diameter. All round it towered irregular bowlders, some rising sheer, others at an angle that formed a cavernous shelter at their base. From the left grew a pine-tree, slanting upward, and its spreading limbs served as a roof to the opening above. To one side was a pallet of fragrant spruce-boughs, and near by blazed a tiny fire of pitched wood, over which, spitted on an alder-shoot spanning two forked twigs, the carcass of a small animal was roasting.

The rude preparations for supper and sleep, the bleak environment of this rocky nest in the wilderness, told a simple, pathetic story as plainly as words could have done. For such a bitter mess of pottage had the persecuted minister sold his birthright, forsaken the pleasant life of London town and Norfolk hamlet, an eminent career at the bar and the patronage of the great Lord Coke.

But if Roger Williams felt the contrast he was far from showing it. Cheerfully, with his habitual sweet smile, he placed a slab of bark for his guests, and seated himself on a stone opposite.

"You shall share our frugal meal, if you will," said he. "And meanwhile, till it be ready, may I listen to your adventures?"

"The wolves will feast to-night," said Humfrey. "Dare I speak openly?" and he threw a meaning glance at the Indian, who squatted stolidly by the fire, turning the spit.

"Shingascung the Narragansett is my brother," Roger Williams replied. "He is to be trusted even as you would trust me. Have no fear."

Their confidence thus invited, the lads gave

between them a brief account of the things that had befallen them in the forest. The narrative held the minister's close attention, drawing a word of comment now and then, or striking a flash of interest from his eyes.

"I'm not surprised," said he, when he had put a few questions, "for I heard a fortnight past that Pequots had been seen within the territory of the Bay Colony. Their errand? —that I know not. But you did quite right to defend yourselves. I, who detest bloodshed, would have done the same. 'Twill be just as well, however, to be chary of speech concerning this matter."

"We will heed your advice," replied Humfrey. "The Indian whom we slew lies in a deep thicket, and the wolves will not be long in finding the body."

"Let us hope so, Master Brewster. Dry bones tell but an incomplete tale. As for the bog, 'twill keep its secret fast. By-the-by, did I not see both of you at Jarvis Story's house three nights ago?"

"We were there, sir," exclaimed Rufus, "and escaped by a window before the Governor recognized us. Indeed, we think it

shameful that you should suffer such treatment for preaching what even your enemies must know to be the truth."

"I desire all men to be my friends," said Roger Williams, with a sad smile, "but they will not have it so. My dear lads, you are young—you stand on the threshold of wide possibilities. Be honest, true to yourselves. Lead sincere lives. So far as you can hold fast to liberty of conscience, yet—and in this I counsel you from bitter experience—flaunt it not where it may be ill-received. 'Tis a priceless jewel, and hard to acquire. I've sought it vainly at home in England, with no better success in the settlements of the New World. But come what may, until my last breath I'll maintain the right to speak and think from the soul that God hath given me."

Shingascung, waking from his statuesque immobility, reached out a bronzed arm to replenish the fire, and jabbed the roasting meat with a pine-splint. 'Twas just then that Rufus leaned forward to steady one of the forked twigs, and from the bosom of his doublet, which he had partly opened to the

warmth, there fell the letter entrusted to him by Boston's chief magistrate. Roger Williams quickly picked it up and handed it to the lad, and in so doing perforce observed the familiar seal on the reverse side.

"I'm carrying it to Governor Bradford," said Rufus, as he restored the letter to its place.

"'Twas given you prior to or after the meeting at Jarvis Story's?" casually inquired the minister.

"'Twas after," put in Humfrey, failing to catch the drift of the question.

Williams shrugged his shoulders almost imperceptibly, and the corners of his mouth tightened in a grim, ironical expression.

"I've been thinking," he said a minute later, in a matter-of-fact tone. "For prudent reasons you'd best not remain here till morning, loth though I am to cast you adrift again. But Shingascung will guide you to the bridle-path—you've gone far astray—and will leave you within six miles of Plymouth. The moon is bright, and I'll provide you with a sufficiency of pine-wood torches, so there will be nothing to fear from wild beasts. You

shall sup with me first, and then I'll wish you Godspeed."

This proposition was unexpected, and did not entirely please the lads, since they were weary and footsore, and would have preferred to spend the night in their present snug quarters. But the choice not resting with them, they concealed their dissatisfaction. When the cooked meat was served on trenchers of birch-bark, seasoned with a pinch of salt, they discovered how hungry they were. Having done ample justice to the food, which put fresh strength into them, they soon afterward made ready for the journey and set off, Roger Williams going with the little party for a few yards.

"Here we part," said he, pausing.

"But you will come later to Plymouth?" asked Rufus. "You have good friends there, and can count on a welcome."

"A welcome that would speedily grow cold, as you may understand before you are many hours older," was the evasive reply. "One thing I venture to ask of you. Do not, unless you are questioned, tell any person that you have seen me."

Both lads gave him an earnest assurance of silence.

"I thank you for the promise," he said gratefully. "'Tis conditional, remember. If you're interrogated, then speak out freely. And now farewell. Heaven keep you safely!"

With that the young minister turned back to his lonely retreat, and in single file the three plunged into the forest, the Indian leading the way with a burning brand. Fatigue was forgotten as the lads followed their dusky guide, who continued mostly at a dog-trot, and seemed never for a moment at fault. Not a word was spoken. Silently they pushed on, and came in rather more than an hour to a narrow and faint track, so little-trodden, indeed, that it could scarcely be perceived even by the light of the pine-knot.

"Plymouth trail," said Shingascung, in his guttural voice, as he pointed ahead. "Keep eyes open—no miss."

He ignited a faggot of pitched wood for each of his companions, and the next instant was gone, a parted coppice swinging shut behind his tall figure. With their firelocks

strapped across their shoulders, carrying their flaring torches high, the lads struck into the winding path. So long as they exercised ordinary vigilance they were unlikely to lose it, for at short intervals the trunks of the great trees were blazed with an axe.

"We're all right now," said Humfrey. "It can't be much more than eleven o'clock, and we ought to do the six miles in considerably under two hours. What a lot of things have happened since we left Boston yesterday morning. Why, there's been enough of adventure to last us half a lifetime. Did it occur to you,Rufus, that Master Williams was somewhat anxious to be rid of our company?"

"Nay, surely you misjudge him. 'Twas for our own good he bade us go. He spoke of prudent reasons, Humfrey."

"But what could they have been? Was he afraid, think you, that friends of those dead Pequots were following our trail?"

"Possibly 'twas that," Rufus assented.

"Well, we're not likely to meet with any further adventures this side of Plymouth," pursued Humfrey. "Wilt deliver the letter to-night, or wait till morning? You'd never

have been entrusted with it, I'll warrant, had Governor Vane but known who defaced the standard."

"I would do the same thing over again, if I had the chance," Rufus boldly declared.

"You don't really mean that."

"I'd like to show you."

Humfrey, somewhat puzzled by his friend's mood, lapsed into reflective silence. They had now gone about a mile from where they parted with the Indian, and a little later, as they were pressing along a very wild and rugged part of the trail, keeping watch for the blazed trees, a sound of voices came suddenly to their ears from no great distance. They paused to listen, startled and incredulous, and at the same instant, before either could speak, a man rose up from a copse on the left. Swarthy, black-bearded, clad as a sailor—such was the first hasty impression of him read by the glow of the torches.

"Hold, young sirs, a word with you," he cried roughly, levelling a firelock. "Nay, bide as you are, with hands up. Whither bound, and what's your business?"

"Does that concern you?" exclaimed

Rufus, his temper ruffled by the cool demand.

"I make it my pleasure."

"Well, then, to satisfy your curiosity, we're traveling from Boston to Plymouth."

"And why by night?"

"The storm delayed us," put in Humfrey. "Wilt lower that weapon, sir, and let us pass?"

As he spoke a merry peal of laughter rang through the forest, too clear to be mistaken. The bearded stranger, who had seemed to hesitate for an instant, glanced with a scowl in the direction of the noise, muttering under his breath. He slipped quickly to the rear of the lads, his firelock still at his shoulder.

"I've no authority to let you go your way," said he. "There are others yonder who may be desirous of your company for a time. Right-about! March!"

Fuming with rage, yet not daring to disregard the command, Rufus and Humfrey struck off to the left of the trail, guided by an occasional word from their captor, who followed close at their heels. A ruddy light winked at them through the trees, and of a sudden a rich, pleasing voice began:

"Since Helen sang the songs of Troy,
And Dido fled from ancient Tyre,
Since Herod's daughter danced for joy,
And Cleopatra strung her lyre,
Since then, all men, at Siren's call,
Have slaved, and braved, in lover's thrall,
And blindly tripped it to their fall.

"But we, of sterner metal, spurn,
The wiles that blandish but to burn.
The sword's our mistress, her we serve,
We flaunt the steel, the spoils deserve,
And if perchance ——"

Some one, doubtless perceiving the glare of the approaching torches, called out harshly. The ballad came to an abrupt ending, and the next instant the lads emerged from a copse of bushes and stood in the presence of the singer.

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH THE LADS FALL IN WITH MERRY BUT DOUBTFUL COMPANY

THE spot to which the lads had been brought thus unwillingly—they instantly recognized it—was one of evil omen, feared and avoided by the people of Plymouth, where in the early days of the colony a too-confiding settler and his family had been cruelly slain by starving Indians whom they had succored. In a clearing of small extent, begirt by encroaching timber and brake, stood the long-disused cabin, its front open to the forests, its roof partly tumbled in, and the side and rear walls in scarcely better preservation. But to-night, what with the strange and merry company it held, and the great fire blazing on a patch of sward just outside, the place looked cheerful enough. Gathered around the crackling logs—for the storm had cooled the atmosphere—were half a dozen sturdy fellows of truculent mien and hardened visage, armed to the teeth, and all seafaring

desperadoes from their thick beards and sun-blackened skin, their short, wide trowsers and broad-rimmed hats of palmetto straw. Behind them on what had been the threshold of the ruined cabin sat three others with a flaring pine-knot thrust into a crevice between them. A heap of spruce-boughs laid for bedding, and a number of bulky packages covered with sail-cloth, lent a shadowy background to the scene.

There was a short interval of silence. The lads could almost feel the intense, searching scrutiny that was leveled at them by the entire crew, whom they in turn regarded with what courage they could muster. Then one of the above mentioned three sprang to his feet with an angry exclamation.

"Pharaoh, how comes this?" he demanded. "You've disobeyed orders, you dog."

"And with sound reason, else my name's not Pharaoh Flinton," replied the ruffian who had brought the prisoners in. "If you'd made less noise, sir, there would have been no necessity to ——"

The first speaker intervened with a gesture of impatience, and having curtly dismissed the man to his post, he turned to Rufus and

Humfrey and looked them steadily in the face for a moment. He had already shown himself to be a person of some authority, although his age was not above twenty-three or twenty-four at the most. For the rest, his figure was slim and sinewy, there was a touch of the swashbuckler in his easy bearing, and his features, cut in faultless lines, challenged irresistible admiration at first sight. He was an Englishman, beyond doubt, and of no mean birth. A silky, golden moustache shaded his upper lip, his hair fell in light, curling locks to his shoulders, and the sun had kindly tanned his cheeks to a most becoming hue of ruddy-brown. He wore high boots of rich leather turned over at the knee, and carried a sword with a jeweled hilt; his doublet was slashed, his cloak lined with blue taffeta, and on his yellow tresses was perched a soft, low-crowned hat, its wide rim looped up at one side with a silver buckle and decked with a sweeping black plume.

Having taken brief stock of the lads, he stepped toward them with a smile that added not a little to his charms, bowing slightly as he doffed his hat.

"Why, you're but a couple of striplings!" he exclaimed; and his voice was like a ripple of laughter. "Come! cheer up—I bid you heartily welcome. Away with melancholy. There's no occasion for it, believe me. Ha! I'd forgotten my attempt at a song, which must have been poor indeed. Had I known that strangers were within earshot——"

"We should be very glad to hear the remainder of it, sir," put in Rufus, whose fears were fast vanishing.

"Slife! you've a ready wit—and the tact of a courtier," cried the fine young gentleman. "'Twas never the wilderness nurtured you, I'll warrant. We shall be friends, I perceive, if you'll have it so. And why not? I beg you will regard me as at your service, and consent to overlook what must appear to you the most unwarrantable conduct of my good Pharaoh, who was clearly of the opinion that you'd gone astray in the forest."

"We were not at fault, sir," said Humfrey. "If you truly wish to serve us, let us continue our journey without further delay."

"'Tis not to be thought of," was the smiling reply. "'Twould be inviting all sorts of peril

to send you forth into the darkness and the night. Sink me, but I've taken a fancy to your company, and that's a compliment Vaylmer Laplash pays to few. Say no more. Here you are, and here you bide till morning, when you shall go your way rejoicing. I'll hold you no longer, I vow."

As their would-be host was obviously a gentleman of tenacious purpose, and not to be argued out of it, the lads had no choice but to fall in with his wishes. Discarding their torches they followed him past the fire to the threshold of the cabin, Humfrey accepting the situation reluctantly and with an ill grace, while Rufus seemed to regard it from an opposite point of view. The adventure promised to be pleasing and harmless, he told himself.

"Allow me to make you acquainted with my very good comrades," said Vaylmer Laplash. "You behold on the left Captain Dollier Le Casson, a true gallant and soldier of France, though you'll find him serving under any banner that bids for a life of action. The other is Barbe Rouge—you'll not seek far for the name. He is a knave of parts, hath a

ready wit for any emergency, is sanctimonious to a degree, and can snuffle sermons like a parson. Add to this a strong arm and a conscience lacking, and you'll perceive his value."

"Assez! mon ami," exclaimed the Frenchman, with a quick, warning glance at Laplash. "I offer most cordial greetings to your new friends," he continued in a different tone, as he slowly rose. He was perhaps six and twenty, as finely attired as his young leader, with reckless dissipated features. He wore a dark moustache with ends twisted straight up, and a slight tuft of hair under his lower lip.

As for the man called Barbe Rouge, though he also had risen at the introduction, he had only a scowl by way of acknowledgment. For an instant the light shone on his lanky six-foot frame illy-clad, his pale, watery eyes and crooked nose, the sallow face patched with a straggling beard of fiery red; then, with a low-muttered word or two, he clumsily retreated to the shadows behind him and threw himself on the spruce-boughs.

"Sulky dog!" said Laplash. "What's come over him? He was merry enough a bit ago."

"Parbleu! he's abashed by your open praise," Captain Le Casson laughed sneeringly.

"Mayhap; but 'tis not like him to be thin-skinned, Dollier."

"The worm will turn, mon cher Vaylmer. Prenez garde!"

They dropped languidly to one of two hewn logs placed at right angles on the floor, and Rufus and Humfrey seated themselves on the other. The men lounging on the grass outside, who had been paying the closest attention to what was going on, with an air of relief returned to the game they had been playing in the turf by the fire.

It was a weird, half-enchanting scene. The uncouth voices and faces of the picturesquely-clad sailors, the fire-flashes leaping in chase of the shadows that quivered by the sombre forest verge, the play of the moonlight silting through banks of foliage, the comely presence of Vaylmer Laplash and the young Frenchman, their gay, bantering conversation and laughter—all helped to weave a charm about Rufus, to steep his imagination in sweet, intangible dreams of romance.

His mood had changed; he felt the soothing spell of the contrast between his fight for life with the perils of the wilderness and this camp of rollicking, worldly-minded adventurers. Forgotten was Roger Williams, and the influence of his heroic example. Again the lad was stirred by vague longings, restless, burning desires, as on the day when Sir Lanslott Charmion and Annis appeared to him as a vision from another world.

Vaylmer Laplash plied the lads with pleasantries and Rufus fell merrily in with his mood, regardless of a beseeching nudge from Humfrey. His cheeks flushed, his voice grew loud. Deftly urged by Laplash, he spoke of the journey through the forest, of the monotonous life he had led since childhood, and even of Sir Lanslott and his daughter.

Humfrey, disdaining all overtures, aware of the futility of remonstrance or pleading, sat in neglected silence, his honest heart sorely troubled for his friend. And in the dusky background Barbe Rouge, his head uplifted among the spruce-boughs and his gray eyes as venomous as a serpent's, watched and listened.

"Helas! what an existence," sneered Dollier Le Casson. "'Twas never meant for one of your metal, my boy."

"You're right, sir," exclaimed Rufus. "I'm sick and tired of it all. Ah, if I could but travel and see the world like Sir Lanslott Charmion ——"

"To that worthy gentleman's good health," interrupted Vaylmer Laplash, raising his cup.

"And not forgetting the fair mademoiselle," put in Le Casson.

The other laughed, then stepped to the rear in quest of his tobacco pouch. Humfrey took prompt advantage of this move, and of a noisy outburst at the same instant from the crew outside on the firelit sward.

"Art blind, Rufus?" he whispered. "These are no comrades for us. They're in the forest to barter unlawfully with the Indians—to sell them muskets, and powder and ball, and under yonder sailcloth will be their bales of goods. Doubtless they've a vessel snugly hidden in some inlet of the coast."

"Nay, you're surely wrong," Rufus answered carelessly. "Have they the look of

common traders, these fine gentlemen? And even if——"

"Hush!" cautioned Humfrey. "You'll be overheard."

Laplash, returning at that moment, clapped Rufus on the shoulder.

"Sink me, but I like your spirit, my young Puritan—and your looks as well," said he. "You're wasted, thrown away, here in this narrow-minded, woebegone colony of his gracious majesty Charles Stuart. Seems a pity."

"Ay, so it is," assented Le Casson. "He had better join us. We'll show him the world, and perhaps make his fortune."

"I should dearly love to come with you," vowed Rufus, his eyes sparkling with excitement.

Humfrey, whose presence had been contemptuously ignored, now rose, yawning, and withdrew a little to one side, where he stretched himself on the rotted floor, using his hat for a pillow. But Vaylmer Laplash and his friend were in no mind for bed, and finding Rufus as wide-awake as themselves, and eager to listen, they captivated him still

further with glowing, vivid descriptions of the great world of which he was so densely ignorant. They had dwelt in London and Paris, had visited most of the capitals of Europe. And the New World, it would appear, they were no less acquainted with. Rufus felt that he could listen till morning to the splendid pictures they drew of the life that he longed to see for himself. The magic poison was sucking at his soul, and when his companions struck up a rollicking ditty he made a valorous attempt to join in the chorus.

"Why, the lad's doing finely," cried Laplash. "Sink me, Dollier, but I'll not consent to part with him."

"If he's to be one of us," said Le Casson, "he must look less like a Puritanical psalm-singer."

"'Tis easily done," declared Laplash.

He walked unsteadily to the rear of the cabin, where he fumbled for several minutes beneath the sail-cloth. He returned with a richly-laced, dove-colored coat of soft, beautiful material, and a sash of dark-blue silk; and when Rufus had not unwillingly doffed his sombre cloak and arrayed himself in the bor-

rowed finery, and had perched Laplash's plumed and buckled hat on his tawny-brown locks, the transformation was so complete that even Carver Jennicom would scarcely have recognized him.

"Parbleu! he has the distinguished air," cried Le Casson.

"Why, look you! he's the living image of my young lord Carstairs, of Heron Court in Hampshire," vowed Laplash. "To our new comrade, Dollier! Come, you shall sup with us, lad!"

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH CAPTAIN STANDISH AND HIS MUSKETEERS PLAY THE LEADING PART

ALONGSIDE the Plymouth trail the sentry, overcome by drowsiness, lay snoring on his back in a patch of fern, as dead to the world as those whom he was supposed to be guarding. Eastward the day came on apace, but the sun, as if loth to approach that spot of bloody memory, was a long time in reaching the ruined cabin. At length the golden beams slanted between the tree-trunks, turning the dewdrops to diamonds where they touched the grass, and lingering on the huddled forms around the cold ashes of the fire. Streaming through a crevice of the logs, the warm light bathed the heavy sleepers within. Rufus stirred, blinked at the gaping roof above him, and was awake.

For the first time in his life the lad's head ached, throbbed with dull pain. He remained quiet, his brain befuddled, trying to bring reason out of chaos; and gradually, bit by

bit, he recalled the events of the previous night. He was on the outer side of the spruce-boughs, and raising himself on one elbow he saw three motionless forms to the right of him. He sank back again, and lay wrestling with his troubled spirit, shame and remorse struggling weakly to throw off the spell that had been so tightly woven about him, until a wheezing, rattling yawn broke the stillness. He of the red beard was on his feet, his greenish eyes searching the interior of the cabin.

"Hist! comrades, there's something wrong," he exclaimed hoarsely.

The other two instantly awoke and sat up, their senses as keenly on the alert as if they had not slept at all.

"Why, how's this?" Laplash demanded angrily. "The sentry should have roused us at dawn. What are you staring at, Barbe Rouge?"

"Parbleu! dost see a ghost?" cried Le Casson. "Speak, fellow!"

"T'other lad?" gasped Barbe Rogue. "Where is he?"

Where indeed? Humfrey was gone—it

needed but a glance to tell Rufus that. Laplash and Le Casson sprang erect, and the former, as he reached for his pistols, gave a lusty call that brought the men outside to their feet in ludicrous haste and confusion.

"We're betrayed!" Barbe Rouge screamed shrilly. "Look! what moves yonder? I caught a flash of metal in the coppice. And there's a headpiece parting the leaves ——"

"I see it," broke in Le Casson. "Morbleu! the enemy are upon us, Vaylmer."

The words had no sooner left his lips than the border of the forest became alive with armed men in leather and steel. The thickets disgorged them by twos and threes, very nearly a score in all. With firelocks at shoulder they advanced a few paces, and their leader, a large and handsome man of military bearing, called for instant surrender.

"'Tis Captain Standish and his musketeers!" sang out Barbe Rouge, in accents of fright and dismay.

That the fellow should have recognized the veteran soldier did not at the moment occur to Rufus as being strange. Dazed and startled by the sudden attack, by the deafening uproar

"'TIS CAPTAIN STANDISH AND HIS MUSKETEERS!"

that immediately followed the futile demand for surrender, he stood watching the thrilling drama that whirled its rapid course before his eyes.

The sailors, raving like wild beasts, stooped to grab the loaded weapons that had been lying alongside of them while they slept. Two fired wildly at the musketeers, who replied with a single shot as they made a dash to come to close quarters. Laplash discharged his pistol, and a Plymouth man reeled and fell. Several pieces roared thunderously, and the pungent, blue powder-smoke, hanging in the still air, settled and spread over the scene like a pall. Into it plunged Laplash, with Barbe Rouge clamoring at his heels. Le Casson leaped after them, but not until he had spun Rufus half-round and thrust a firelock into his hands.

"You're bound to fight for us," he cried. "Remember that."

The weapon slipped from the lad's nerveless grasp. He never stirred, though the musket-balls hissed right and left of him. He felt an eager desire to escape, to get away and hide himself in the depths of the forest,

but his limbs, as if weighted with lead, refused to obey his will.

"Humfrey is to blame for this," he muttered through clenched teeth.

Less than a minute had elapsed since the unexpected appearance of the Puritan soldiers, who had little dreamed of meeting with such a stubborn resistance. On the dewy sward, around the trampled ashes of the campfire, the fighting drew quickly to a finish. The crash of muskets had ceased, for the combatants were now engaged hand to hand. Very dimly, like black shadows that flashed and receded, they loomed amid the smoke, crouching and striking, and yelling. The tumult subsided a little, and appeals for quarter were heard. Captain Standish shouted rapid commands.

"All's lost!" cried Laplash, his voice ringing loudly. "To the woods!"

A bearded sailor, dripping blood from a slash on the elbow, bounded over the threshold of the cabin, and scrambling up the rear wall of logs with the agility of a cat, he pulled himself through a shutterless window and vanished. Close behind him, and doubtless

with similar intent, Barbe Rouge groped, empty-handed, from the bluish haze, and ran blindly into Rufus. They fell together, and scrambled as quickly to their feet.

"Out of the way, you!" snarled the man.

The nasal intonation of the words, the savage glare that accompanied them and showed the whites of the eyes, flashed a startling and hitherto-unsuspected revelation to the lad's mind. At once, in spite of the red beard and crooked nose, he knew Barbe Rogue for what he was.

"Pybus Foulfoot!" he cried in astonishment.

"Ay, Pybus Foulfoot," echoed the ruffian, as he whipped a short-bladed knife from his belt. "I've a score to settle, young master. 'Tis worth risking freedom to make an end of Carver Jennicom's whelp."

He aimed a furious, deadly blow, and it was more by chance than skill that Rufus, flinging up his right arm, caught the descending wrist and checked the weapon's point within an inch of his face. Barbe Rogue fastened on the lad with his other hand, and for a moment, neither losing his grip, they

swayed and struggled, shuffling over the floor. Then there was a rush of footsteps, a noise of shouting. The knife was knocked from the ruffian's fingers and sent spinning across the cabin, and the next instant he was lying on his back with three musketeers fighting hard to keep him there.

"Don't let him break away!" exclaimed Rufus. "'Tis Pybus Foulfoot, who's wanted at Plymouth."

"Why, so it is!" cried Captain Standish, just then arriving on the scene. "Faith! here's a haul I didn't look for. Watch sharp, my good fellows—the rogue is as slippery as an eel." With that he turned to Rufus. "Art hurt, Master Jennicom?" he inquired. "No? 'Tis more than some of your comrades can say."

The lad was tongue-tied, struck dumb with confusion. Picking up Vaylmer Laplash's plumed hat from the floor, he clapped it on his head with a half-defiant gesture. His eyes dropped before the steady, displeased scrutiny of the old soldier, whose mouth twitched under his grizzled moustache, where lurked the grim suspicion of a smile.

"Ah! here you are, Rufus," exclaimed Hum-

frey Brewster, pushing to the spot. "And safe and sound, too. I hoped you were lying low while the bullets were flying. 'Twas the last thing we expected, such a stubborn show of resistance, else we had ——"

He stepped hurriedly back in sorrowful consternation, for Rufus, his face livid with passion, had flown at him with clenched fists. Captain Standish threw himself timely between the two.

"This is shameful," he cried, in a stern voice. "A most wanton assault! Must I clap you in irons, Master Jennicom, or will you keep the peace?"

"He betrayed my friends," Rufus said fiercely, glaring at Humfrey.

"Friends, indeed! Misguided lad, d'you wish to bring Carver Jennicom's gray hairs down in sorrow to the grave?"

"'Twas for your own good," Humfrey protested sadly. "You would have gone off with those lawless freebooters, had I not carried word to Plymouth. They're a pack of knaves, Rufus."

"Knave yourself," retorted Rufus. "I've done with you, Humfrey."

"Master Jennicom is in no mind to see reason," said Captain Standish. "Leave him alone, till he comes to his senses."

The Captain was quite right. Rufus could not have told why he so bitterly resented Humfrey's action, for he knew in his own heart that his late companions were no more than splendid rogues, and that he was well out of their clutches. But they, and their alluring pictures of a wider life, still held a measure of fascination for him. Planting himself against an upright post, with his hands thrust into the folds of his sash, he gazed about him with a sullen air of bravado. His first discovery—and it caused him genuine satisfaction—was that both Vaylmer Laplash and Dollier Le Casson had made good their escape.

"Shall we follow up the fugitives, sir?" inquired a musketeer of his leader. "They'll strike for the coast, where they've certainly got a vessel waiting."

"Let them go," replied Captain Standish. "They've had a lesson, and 'twill be a good riddance if they get clean away. We've quite enough on our hands as it is. There has been

grievous bloodshed," he added. "I trust you've made no error of judgment, Master Brewster."

"None, sir, I'm convinced," declared Humfrey.

He removed the sail-cloth from the bales of goods, which, done up in portable shape, proved on brief examination to contain a large quantity of powder and ball, cases of flint-locks, and a number of casks.

"The scrubby scoundrels!" cried Captain Standish. "They were bound inland to trade with the redskins. Why, there's enough stuff here to have turned half a tribe into howling fiends and armed them for the war-path. 'Tis by God's mercy so great a peril to the colony hath been averted."

His voice husky with indignation, he singled out eight of his men by name, who were to start with him at once for Plymouth. The rest he instructed to follow as soon as they had buried the dead, bearing the confiscated goods and carrying their wounded comrades on litters.

"Art ready?" he inquired, turning to Rufus.

"May I have my own coat and hat, sir?" the lad pleaded reluctantly.

"Nay, you shall go as you are, arrayed in all your glory," vowed the Captain, with a gruff laugh. "Your spirit needs chastening, Master Jennicom. The town folk shall see what a sparking young swashbuckler you've become during your absence."

"As you please, sir," Rufus assented jauntily. "There's naught to be ashamed of."

"You've got the letter safe?" Humfrey ventured to ask him, in a low tone.

"That's my concern—and Governor Bradford's," was the curt reply that stung Humfrey's faithful heart.

A drummer was of the party—military precedents were rigidly observed in the New England colonies—and fetching his instrument and sticks from behind a tree, he beat a few muffled taps. The chosen number quickly formed and marched away from the camp in the direction of the Plymouth trail, Rufus and Humfrey in front with Captain Standish, and the eight musketeers bringing up the rear with the prisoners. Barbe Rouge cast longing glances at the dense forest right and left, and

his lagging gait had frequently to be hastened by the application of a firelock's butt. There was fear as well as smouldering rage in the depths of his gray-green eyes, for he dreaded above all things the return to the settlement whence two years before, as Pybus Foulfoot, the Governor's bond-servant, he had fled after being detected in the commission of a crime by Carver Jennicom and his son. That had been on a Sunday, he remembered, and strangely enough it was the first day of the week that now beheld him going back to meet his punishment.

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH THE STORM BREAKS

THE majority of the good people of Plymouth, waking up on that fair Sabbath morning in July with their thoughts properly attuned to the sober and religious duties of the day, were speedily thrown into a worldly-minded flutter by more or less garbled reports —had from those who were earlier astir, of Humfrey Brewster's arrival just before dawn and the immediate despatch to the wilderness of a column of musketeers under Captain Standish, who had happened to be staying that night at a friend's house within the town.

One account, readily believed, was to the effect that the crew of a buccaneering vessel, lying some miles up the bay, had captured Rufus Jennicom and were now marching to attack the settlement. The true version, as it gradually became known, was almost as exciting, and quite eclipsed in public interest an event of so recent occurrence as the previous

evening; the same being the unexpected return of the Marygold, which, having taken her distinguished passengers as far south as New Amsterdam and then sailed north again to revisit Boston, had in passing touched at Plymouth to repair sundry damage suffered in a storm.

The ship swung at anchor close off shore, a Sunday calm pervading her deck, but the vicinity of the harbor was deserted, and scarcely a soul was visible along the length and breadth of the street that mounted upward from the water's edge. At sunrise you would have found them mostly, men, women, and children, standing in groups by the northwestern border of the town, watching the dark mouth of the trail that had swallowed Captain Standish and his party and by which they were expected to return.

"Something crashed just now," exclaimed old Dugald Fisher, putting a hand to his ear. "I'm thinking it might have been the report of a musket. Mayhap they're fighting near by."

"I heard it, Dugald," said his wife. "'Twas a dead limb falling."

"Woman, you're wrong," he told her scornfully. "D'you no ken the sound of firearms?"

"When the soldiers come we'll see them, and not before," wisely observed Jeremy Quills; and with that, finding hunger stronger than curiosity, he hobbled off to his untasted breakfast.

Others presently followed his example, and as the day wore on and the hour of morning service approached, force of habit—or possibly fear of consequences—drew many persons to the town square, which was the customary place of assemblage. They loitered in a body around the four pieces of cannon, now gaping along the cross-street, now up to the sentries pacing the flat roof of the fort, the while freely expressing the wish that Captain Standish and his musketeers might arrive before the time set for prayer and preaching.

A restless swarm of dull-colored, steeple-crowned hats, with here and there a gleam of white coif or ruff, met the eye from the Governor's residence on the corner. Among the rose-bushes in the prim, tiny little garden sauntered Sir Lanslott Charmion and Mistress

Annis, who had come ashore after breakfast for the purpose of attending church, as well as to inquire into the report that had reached them on board ship. In the doorway stood the kindly magistrate and Carver Jennicom. The latter, summoned hence an hour ago, had learned what little there was to know. It was enough, however, to account for the look of strained anxiety his rugged features bore. The presence of the baronet and his daughter—whose return to Plymouth he had not foreseen when he summoned Rufus from Boston—was overshadowed by the far greater trouble that preyed on his mind.

"We all have our crosses to bear," Governor Bradford was saying, as he clapped a friendly hand on the elder man's shoulder.

"And mine is a heavy one, sir."

"You take it too hard, Jennicom. I fear I've told you more than was wise."

"Nay, 'tis best in the end. You know the hopes I've built on Rufus—how I've guided him in the only way, that he might grow up to be a pillar of the church and colony. And now—and now—why, the words scorch my very tongue, sir. To think that he should

welcome the advances of such wicked men, consort with ruffians of desperate venture ——"

"Your questions probed me too deeply, Jennicom. If I repeated so much, understand that I had it in confidence from Master Brewster, who urged the same as a reason for taking prompt steps to rescue your son."

"But 'tis no more than truth, sir," replied Jennicom.

The Governor, at a loss for words, cleared his throat.

"I'm puzzled by the lad's story," he continued after a pause. "If these men are indeed freebooters—and there may be some room for doubt—'twould seem they're led by two who might be better engaged. The one, Dollier Le Casson, I've some knowledge of by repute. The other is a young Englishman, Vaylmer Laplash by name."

"Laplash?" echoed Jennicom, drawing a quick, sharp breath.

The baronet and his daughter stopped suddenly among the rose-bushes.

"Father, you heard?" Annis questioned sharply.

Sir Lanslott looked down into the girl's

lovely face; her eyes met his steadily, without a flutter.

"Ay, my child, I heard," he answered gravely.

They moved off to the far end of the garden, where they might hold converse with no fear of a listener.

"'Twill all come right," said the Governor, reassuringly. "Reserve your judgment, and remember that Rufus is young. There's good blood in him, Jennicom."

"Or bad," muttered the old Puritan to himself. "Ay, or bad," he repeated.

Time was passing. Unverified rumors, readily accepted for the moment, frequently sent an expectant murmur through the close, swaying ranks of the people. The minister arrived, garbed in his robes of office, and when a stalwart drummer came soon afterward from the fort, preparations began at once for the usual ceremony of marching to church in military array.

Governor Bradford opened his gate and stepped forth, followed by his guests. The men, shouldering musket or firelock, formed in line three abreast. The chief magistrate

moved to his place in the rear, flanked on the right by the preacher, and on the left, in the absence of Captain Standish, by a sub-officer of the garrison wearing side-arms and carrying a cane.

The drummer, who had been sounding a low, tremulous tattoo, ceased for a moment, waiting the signal to strike up the quick-step. And in the brief silence, from some distance away, a lively, inspiriting "rat-a-tat-tat" swelled and vibrated on the morning air. It was the beat of another drum. The absent soldiers were coming at last.

"You'll not be holding your flock," the Governor told the divine.

"Nay, sir, they're on the point of starting. But I'm truly distressed to perceive, on the Sabbath day, such a secular spirit——"

"The service must be postponed for the present—'tis unavoidable," interrupted the Governor.

He nodded to the officer, who quickly gave the command to break ranks and disperse. The Governor, with Jennicom on one side of him and Sir Lanslott and his daughter on the

other, waited with an air of authority in front of his house.

"There they are!" "Now they're coming!" eager voices exclaimed.

Keeping step to the beat of the drum, flanked and rear-guarded by a noisy, inquisitive throng, the little detachment marched very soon into the square; first Captain Standish, then Rufus and Humfrey on either side of the drummer, and behind them the grim, leather-clad musketeers escorting the prisoners, who, with their scowling faces and matted beards, their wide, flapping trowsers and queer head-covering, were the observed of all. The low, excited murmur swelled to a louder strain, broke into mocking laughter and wondering exclamations, when Rufus was recognized for the first time.

"Look at Master Jennicom in his brave finery!" cried Jeremy Quills, who had by no means forgotten the grudge he owed the lad. "Was ever such a pretty gamecock seen in Plymouth, neighbors?"

"Why, 'tis the same young stripling we're so deeply indebted to," declared Sir Lanslott. "Zounds! I'd hardly have known him again."

"How handsome he is!—not a bit like a a Puritan," said Annis. "And what an air his fine clothes give him!"

The drum-taps ceased, and the head of the column halted opposite to the Governor's gateway. Rufus, seeing at a glance who stood there, was suddenly shamestruck and wished that the ground might open and swallow him; a fiery blush spread over each cheek and mounted to the roots of his hair. As quickly the weakness passed. Defiantly, with curling lip, he straightened every inch of his stature, showing the perfect and comely fit of the laced coat. For an instant he coolly returned the scrutiny of the little group, then doffed his plumed hat most gracefully to Sir Lanslott and his daughter, bowed to Governor Bradford, and advanced toward his father with outstretched hand.

"Hast no greeting for me?" he asked.

Carver Jennicom's features, as hard and cold as iron, gave no index to his inward emotions—to the paternal yearning and tenderness he was stifling for the sake of what he believed to be his Christian duty.

"Before you clasp hand of mine," he cried sternly, "off with that frippery, and beg forgiveness for your sins."

"Foolish I may have been," Rufus answered haughtily, "but I've done no wrong."

"No wrong? You dare to tell me that?—you who've been treading the path that leads to perdition."

"Jennicom! Jennicom!" expostulated the Governor.

This unpleasant scene, which was witnessed and overheard by many of those who were pressing closely on three sides, happily went no further; for Captain Standish, stepping into the breach and addressing the Governor in tones loud enough for the public ear, made a brief report of the expedition.

"We've had three men disabled by musket-shots," he concluded, mentioning the names of the wounded, "but on the whole the result is most satisfactory, a pernicious and harmful trading-venture having been nipped in the bud. The leaders, though they escaped, will surely lose no time in putting to sea. As for the prisoners, you'll be pleased to know, sir, that among them is none other than your

former bond-servant, Pybus Foulfoot. You'll observe him yonder ——"

"Pybus Foulfoot!" the Governor exclaimed in surprise. "Ay, that's the rogue, right enough, though he's much altered by a broken nose and a growth of beard. At last accounts he was in captivity at Port Royal—why, Jennicom, what ails you? Art ill?"

"'Tis nothing, sir—nothing," Jennicom answered him with an effort.

The bronze hue crept back to his cheeks, which had suddenly paled. His expression was softer, and his lips moved inaudibly, as he looked toward Rufus.

There was a stir among the prisoners, one of whom begged for a few words with the worshipful magistrate. The request was granted, and the man—it was Pharaoh Flinton—was brought forward, out of earshot of his scowling comrades.

"What is it, fellow?" questioned Governor Bradford.

"Give me my freedom," was the bold response, "and I'll tell you what were the real designs of my leaders in these parts, other than to barter with the redskins."

"Is there anything else you wish?" exclaimed the Governor. "Your freedom, indeed! And for some tale concocted on the spur of the moment. Begone to your place."

"Sir, it might be worth while——" began Sir Lanslott Charmion, whose countenance wore a startled, troubled look. He hesitated and stopped.

"Nay, 'tis a shallow trick on the face of it," vowed the Governor. "I'll give these rogues a hearing to-morrow," he added, "and meanwhile let them be kept in safe custody. Captain Standish, do you remain, if you please."

The drum tapped, and the musketeers marched off with the captured freebooters, followed by the larger part of the assemblage. Rufus gazed after them for a moment, and then, drawing a letter from the folds of his tasselled sash, he presented it to Governor Bradford.

"I've the honor to bring you this, sir," he stated, "from Governor Vane of Boston. I was given to understand that it was urgent."

"I thank you, my boy," the magistrate replied. "Pray come indoors, out of the heat of the sun."

The invitation included the whole of the little party, and they followed to a sitting-room on the ground floor of the house, where, with a word of apology, the Governor broke the seal of the letter and ran his eye down the contents.

"That troublesome fellow Williams again, with his seditious conduct," he said wearily. "This time he's gone too far, and a warrant is hanging over his head. I'm asked to apprehend him if he shows himself in or near Plymouth."

Rufus and Humfrey exchanged significant glances. What had puzzled them before was no longer a mystery. It was for their own sakes, out of his fine unselfishness and sense of honor, that Roger Williams had sent them forth into the darkness and peril of the night. He would not permit them to remain in his camp, lest seemingly through his and their connivance the delivery of the letter should be retarded; its ominous purport to himself he had of course divined.

"My lads," the Governor went on, "did you by any chance meet this perverse minister of Salem during your journey?"

There was no reply. The question was suspiciously repeated, and the confused young faces flushed crimson.

"I've no answer to make," declared Rufus, in a low voice.

"Nor I," added Humfrey.

"You've seen him, then—ay, so much is clear," said the Governor. "But when and where?"

Both Rufus and Humfrey were silent. Although the interrogation had absolved them from their promise, they were nevertheless determined to shield the friend who had come to their rescue in a time of desperate need.

"Speak!" exclaimed the Governor, sharply. "You cannot be blind to the consequences if you refuse."

"Such wickedness and obstinacy exceed belief," cried Carver Jennicom. "Rufus, I command you ——"

"Nay, nay, my good Master Jennicom," put in Captain Standish. "Gentler measures first, I entreat you. These brave lads—whose courage and craft under most trying circumstances have but recently come to my knowl-

edge—will surely not persist in their folly. Give them time for consideration."

He related to the little audience the outwitting of the two roving Pequots, as he had heard it from Humfrey that morning during the march to Plymouth. Governor Bradford listened with a troubled countenance, for the shadow of a Pequot rising had loomed larger of late. The narrative evoked unstinted praise and admiration from Sir Lanslott Charmion, and even won a meed of the same from Carver Jennicom. Annis flashed a look at Rufus that made his heart flutter strangely, and in the girl's lovely eyes he fancied he read an entreaty to hold firm.

"Now, my lads, be reasonable," continued the bluff old soldier. "The matter, as you are aware, concerns the sacred upholding of the law. By virtue of the King's authority you're bound to speak. Come, tell us where Roger Williams may be found."

"You must discover that for yourself," Rufus said, doggedly. "I'll not betray a friend."

"And you, Master Brewster? Reflect."

"My answer is the same," Humfrey replied without hesitation.

"Sink me, but I could wish his majesty Charles Stuart had a hundred thousand such loyal supporters," Sir Lanslott muttered under his breath.

Jennicom lifted up his hands in horror. The Governor, with a wrathful exclamation, struck his fist on the table just as a servant entered. He made an inaudible communication to his master and withdrew, to usher into the room the next moment a hard-featured, lank-haired man, booted and spurred and carrying a brace of pistols, whose weary, travel-stained appearance indicated that he had ridden long and far.

"Elias Blades!" gasped Humfrey.

"Now for it," Rufus told himself. He whitened to the lips, for he had little doubt as to what was coming. "You've nothing to do with this—remember," he whispered quickly to Humfrey.

Master Blades, constable of Boston, glanced at the lads with grim and ominous satisfaction, then drew from his doublet a sealed despatch and handed it to the Governor.

"May I attend while you read it, sir?" he asked.

The Governor nodded absently as he broke the wax and opened the paper. For fully a minute after he had mastered the closely-written contents he sat staring into vacancy, his lips compressed and his brow furrowed.

"There are some present who will need to fortify themselves with courage," he said, in a very grave voice. "I have bad news. It appears that last Thursday night, after a seditious meeting held by Roger Williams at the house of one Jarvis Story in Boston, some person or persons did wickedly mutilate the English standard that hung over the gateway of Governor Vane's residence. And you, my lads, are suspected of—nay, are charged with—that monstrous offense. What have you to say for yourselves?"

"Humfrey is innocent," Rufus answered, his fingers tightening on the back of the chair by which he stood.

"And you, my boy?"

"I should like to know the grounds of the accusation, sir."

"I've no statement of that as yet," replied the Governor.

"I can tell you, sir," spoke up Elias Blades. "There's various evidence, but the most important is a knife, with the initials R. J. cut on the haft, that was picked up just inside the Governor's gate. At least two persons have sworn to its ownership."

For a few seconds the silence was tense and breathless.

"The knife is mine," declared Rufus, controlling his voice by a hard effort. "I dropped it in the garden. It was I—and I alone—who cut the cross of St. George from the Governor's standard. I repeat that Humfrey had nothing to do with the affair. He would have prevented it, had he known what I meant to do."

"There were two lads assaulted Mr. Vane's servant," interposed Elias Blades.

Humfrey tried to speak, but choked with emotion. Governor Bradford sighed deeply, and Carver Jennicom, groaning aloud, covered his face with his roughened hands.

"Father, have you no influence?" Annis exclaimed appealingly.

"I wish I had," replied Sir Lanslott. "'Twas a piece of folly, no more. Young

blood runs hot—there's always some excuse for it."

"Not in New England, sir," Captain Standish said gravely.

The baronet stepped over to Rufus. "Cheer up," he whispered, "I'll help you if I can. If you get out of this scrape, and I'm still in the Colonies, I'll take you with me to Virginia, or even to England. You merit a wider career than Plymouth can offer."

He moved away before Rufus could reply, and the Governor hastily brought the distressing scene to a close.

"In your case, Master Brewster," he said, "I'll take the responsibility of detaining you for the present in my own house; the question of your complicity in this serious charge must be dealt with later. As for you, my boy," addressing the self-confessed culprit, "I've no alternative—painful though it is to me—but to commit you to jail at the request of the Boston magistrates, there to await the promised arrival of depositions and a warrant. Directly they come 'twill be my duty to hand you over to the constable for removal to Bos-

ton ——" His voice faltered and broke. "Captain Standish, will you take the prisoner in charge," he added.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH THERE'S A GENERAL JAIL-DELIVERY

TOWARD evening, weary of treading the hard earthen floor that was beginning to show a faint impression of his footsteps from wall to wall, Rufus stepped to the window and pressed his fevered cheeks against the iron bars. The scene without was not of a cheerful nature. A sour-visaged musketeer, his firelock shouldered at an angle, was pacing up and down before the entrance to the jail. The atmosphere was close and heavy, with never a sign of a breeze stirring. A thin, warm drizzle of rain silted from the low-drooping, leaden skies, and a fine mist had rolled in from the sea, softening the harsh, crude outlines of the scattered houses, and causing the distant line of the forest to melt imperceptively into the horizon.

The day was Wednesday, and since the previous Sunday Rufus had been in solitary confinement, left to the companionship of his

bitter thoughts. He had received no message from his father, none from Sir Lanslott Charmion or from Humfrey.

There was hardly a youth in the two colonies, who, plunged in a like sea of trouble and with such gloomy prospects hanging over his head, but would have been utterly crushed, reduced to the very dregs of humiliation and despair. Not so, however, with Rufus Jennicom. Though he suffered keenly, his spirit was unbroken.

"I'll show them," he vowed, with a stubborn laugh. "Come what may, I'll bear it without a murmur. And when they've satisfied their cruel laws, and flung the jail-doors open, that's the last these tyrannical New England colonies will ever see of me. The world is wide, and soldiering shall be my trade. I was cut out for that, I believe. There can be nothing like it for a man of energy. I'll go to the Virginias or Maryland, and some day, perhaps, I may see the wonderful places of Europe that Vaylmer Laplash and Captain Le Casson told me of."

From the dreary perspective of roofs and chimneys, reeking with the mist and rain,

from the glamour of dreams that had veiled this unlovely aspect, he turned to the sordid reality of his cell. Terrifying visions rose up before him—of the pillory and the whipping-post, of the captive shut in for months and years from God's beautiful earth and the bright sunshine, of the trembling felon led forth to lose ears or hand. His was a flagrant misdemeanor, he knew, and forbade all hope of influential aid, either from Sir Lanslott Charmion or from other sources.

"There is no one who cares," he cried aloud. "Not one!"

He thought of his father, lying ill and broken-hearted, remembered the patient, nurturing guidance he had received in childhood. That he was an adopted son had never been suggested to Rufus by the faintest breath or innuendo. His mood softened a little as his fancies strayed backward, and there was a lump in his throat, when the key rattled in the lock and the door swung open on creaking hinges. Entered Seth Dymett the jailer, a man warped and hardened by the duties of his office. He placed a trencher of food and a jug of water on the stool.

"I'm to tell you," he said gruffly, "that the papers in your case arrived to-day from Boston. You're to set out thither in custody to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow?" Rufus echoed.

"Ay, my lad, soon as sun's up. You must be ready when Blades and t'other warrant-officer come for you."

The door closed behind the jailer, and his footsteps died into silence. Rufus, standing by the narrow window, sucked the cool, damp air as if he was stifling. The unconquered, all-defying mood was on him again, and now it clamored for a vent; his fate had suddenly assumed larger, more dreaded proportions. He tugged at the iron bars until his fingers were bruised and the perspiration started to his forehead.

"'Tis no use," he muttered fiercely. "But they shall never take me to Boston. I'll escape somewhere in the forest, if I get a chance."

Escape? No, it was folly to think of it. They would shackle his wrists and watch him day and night. At last he threw himself on the straw mattress, and lay there with his hot

face pressed against the dingy coverlet, in an attitude of utter dejection.

The weather had taken a turn for the worse after sunset. It was a wild and stormy night —such a night as kept the good people of Plymouth indoors, thankful for roof and bed. The rain drizzle became a soaking downpour, driven in sheets by a gale that shrieked and howled from the east.

Jeremy Quills, crouching by the four pieces of cannon in the square and sheltering himself and his hissing brazier as best he could, vowed that a watchman's calling had never been less to his taste. In no better spirits or comfort were the two musketeers—the guard had been doubled—who were on duty at the jail. The rain blew into their faces, streamed from cloaks and hats, and defied the oiled rags that protected the pans of their firelocks. Round and round the building they paced monotonously in the squashing mire, approaching each other, passing with a word or two, and going on to meet again with unfailing regularity.

One by one, as the night ran its slow course, the yellow streaks that glowed here and there at wide intervals were snuffed out. By ten

o'clock but a single light was visible, and that shone from a residence on the corner of the square, where William Bradford was doubtless composing his scholarly history of the Plymouth Plantation. At a quarter to eleven the Governor's window was as dark and cheerless as the others, and not many minutes later a group of dusky figures might have been observed—had any been about to see them—stealing through the town from the north. Now singly, now bunched together, they advanced along the cross-street, watching and listening, gliding from house to house, and frequently stopping to hold a brief consultation. Arrived within twenty yards of the open space, they halted by the angle of a palisade, their eyes fixed on a spot of ruddy firelight that played athwart the dripping pieces of cannon.

"Yonder sits the watchman by his brazier," whispered the young leader of the party. "Shall we make sure of him, Dollier?"

"'Twould be wasting time needlessly," was the reply. "He'll hear nothing, nor stir from his post. Allons! mon cher Vaylmer. To the duty that calls us!"

The band of freebooters—they numbered nine in all—now bore off to the left, avoiding the square entirely. A detour, carried out with the utmost vigilance, presently brought them to within a dozen yards of the rear of the jail. The lee side of a stack of hewn planks afforded a safe shelter, where they had not to wait long in order to learn just how the building was patrolled.

The two musketeers, meeting at the front of the jail, paused to exchange a few words. Then each turned to retrace his steps, reversing the usual order; and each, directly his lagging gait brought him round the corner, was pounced upon by four of the lurking rogues. Thus overmatched and taken by surprise the men had no chance from the first, nor could they make any outcry, since their wind was at once shut off by the pressure of bony fingers. After a short struggle they were dragged to the middle of the patch of sward, where one was thrust into the pillory and the other was bound to the whipping-post.

"'Twas neatly done, that," said Laplash, who had played a passive and guiding part.

"Will the rest be so easy?" asked Le Casson.

"Trust to me, Dollier," was the reply. "If I fail, 'twill not be for lack of nerve."

The captives were left in their helpless, speechless condition, exposed to the pouring rain. Two of Laplash's party donned the Puritan hats and cloaks and shouldered the firelocks, and when he had given brief instructions to these, and had disposed the remainder of his men to right and left of him, the young leader rapped boldly on the oaken, iron-clamped door of the jail. The summons was twice repeated, and then shuffling footsteps grew audible within, while a ray of light flashed at a crevice.

"Who's there?" demanded a gruff voice. "What's wanted at this hour of the night?"

"I come from the fort, with Governor Bradford's written authority to enter," Laplash replied. "A plot to rescue the prisoners is suspected, and I'm to help you take proper precautions. Don't keep me waiting."

"Not so fast," growled the jailer. "Allerton, Minter, art there? Shall I open?"

"Ay, ay, Master Dymett, 'tis all right," the

false sentries answered together, grounding their weapons with a rattling thud.

Several moments of anxious suspense followed. The bolts were slowly drawn, and the key turned in the big lock. The door swung half a foot on its hinges, and the burly figure of Seth Dymett, clad in shirt and breeches and holding a lanthorn, was pressed against the opening. A gust of wind nearly extinguished the light, preventing a satisfactory scrutiny, as he glanced first at Laplash; and then, seeing what he supposed to be the two musketeers standing a couple of yards off, he opened the door wider.

"Where's the Governor's authority?" he asked unsuspiciously.

"Here!" said Laplash, and with that, leaping across the threshold, he fastened his two hands on the jailer's throat. Le Casson sprang forward in time to snatch the lanthorn, others swarmed at his heels, and in a trice the door was pushed shut.

Success had crowned a bold and foolhardy enterprise. Outside the jail, in the rain and wind and darkness, the two disguised sailormen paced up and down, watching and listen-

ing. Inside Seth Dymett, pinned against the wall, offered a stubborn but futile resistence to his enemies. He was speedily bound and gagged, robbed of his keys, and flung upon the bed from which he had been so rudely roused.

"Come," said Laplash.

He led the way with the lanthorn in one hand and the bunch of keys in the other. A hasty search was made, and the first two cells opened were quietly relocked, for their occupants, the man who had been pilloried and the Spaniard, were both sound asleep. In the next were Barbe Rouge, Pharaoh Flinton, and their fellow-prisoners. The flash of the lanthorn instantly woke them, and they could scarcely be restrained from greeting their rescuers in a dangerously boisterous fashion. One by one the four were rid of their irons, as fast as the keys could be found to fit, and then the whole party withdrew to the main passage.

"We've forgotten to look above," said Le Casson, pausing with his hand on the door. "'Twould be most unfortunate if the alarm were given directly we left."

"I'll see to that," replied Laplash. "Twill take but a minute. Don't wait—I'll join you outside."

He had been on the point of extinguishing the lanthorn, but instead he thrust it under his cloak, letting but a thin beam dance before him, and ascended very quickly to the upper floor of the jail. A room to the left was unfastened and empty. Inaccessible, until the proper key came to his hand, was one on the right. The lock turned harshly, and venturing within, the lanthorn lifted high, Laplash swept the ray of light until it rested on a youthful face, but that instant wakened from sleep, which he recognized with a start of surprise.

"Why! sink me! 'tis Master Jennicom," he exclaimed.

"You here?" Rufus muttered incredulously, as he rubbed his eyes. "How did you get in?"

"By force, how else?" was the reply. "And you can guess the motive. But 'tis no time for words, else I'd ask why you've been clapped in durance. The way to freedom lies open. The jailer and the sentries are trussed

like fowls; all Plymouth snores in bed. Come, you shall put to sea with us."

Rufus, suddenly comprehending, drew a long, deep breath. He shook his head.

"What! you refuse to escape?" gasped Laplash. "Canst be so mad?"

"I choose to remain," was the dogged answer, given reluctantly.

Further entreaty proved useless, convincing Laplash that the lad was not to be moved.

"I'll waste no more speech," he cried. "My comrades are ready to start, and the moments are precious as gold. I should force you to accompany me, as a matter of precaution," tapping the pistol that was in his belt, "but if you're a madman you've none the less a sense of honor, else I'm woefully deceived in your face. Wilt promise to give no alarm after we've departed?"

"Right willingly."

"I'll trust you," vowed Laplash, "but I could wish with all my heart that you were ——"

He broke off, hearing his name called in a low voice, and with that he was gone. The glow of the lanthorn faded, and the receding

footsteps were lost in a faint, confused murmur of sound from below, which quickly lapsed into silence.

For perhaps a quarter of an hour Rufus waited in the darkness, sitting on the edge of the pallet, with his mind in a turmoil. It was because of Pybus Foulfoot that he had refused to join Laplash, and he now half-regretted that he had thrown away the opportunity. He suddenly started to his feet. Could it really be true, he asked himself, that the way to freedom was open? A fierce and irresistible desire filled his soul—he hesitated no longer. Groping across the room and down the stairs, he opened the jail door and stepped into the blackness and storm.

Ah! it was no dream—freedom was a delicious reality. Hatless, still wearing his laced coat, the lad made off, darting within several yards of the unseen sentries tied to the wooden instruments of torture. He ran on and on through the silence of the night, heedless of rain and wind, and having left the square behind him he finally paused for breath near the end of the cross-street. He was not far from his home, and the tempta-

tion to pass it was too strong to be resisted.

"If I can't say good-bye to my father, at least I'll take a farewell look at the old house," he vowed, with a lumpy feeling in his throat. "And then for the forest and Roger Williams. He'll surely not refuse to let me share his lot until I've a chance of getting away from the colonies."

CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH PYBUS FOULFOOT FINDS HIMSELF IN A TIGHT CORNER

In spite of certain minor differences of opinion between Carver Jennicom and his neighbors there was hardly a man in Plymouth but held that austere Puritan in the highest esteem and respect. On that Wednesday, as on the days preceding it, a number of persons had called at the lonely palisaded house on the northern verge of the town, some to inquire how the patient was progressing, and some to sit for a few minutes by his bedside in the vain hope of rousing him from his despondency. Governor Bradford, no more successful than the others, had paid a brief visit during the evening and left at nine o'clock. An hour later Dame Tybbott and her nephew, who had shown unwearied attention to the sick man, went off to their own home. This was by Jennicom's express command, and they yielded with less reluctance

to his desire to be alone because, whatever his mental state might be, his physical indisposition was greatly improved. Persistent doses of a steaming-hot drink, brewed from various herbs according to a recipe of his own, had broken the fever which at first threatened to give him a long and dangerous siege. A night's rest promised to complete the recovery and put him on his feet again.

The wind squalled and blustered around the house, now running up the scale to a shrill, whistling note of fury, now dropping to a low, sobbing wail of distress. Jennicom was deaf to the storm, oblivious of his surroundings. "Naught but boyish indiscretion, an eruption of hot young blood that will in due course consume itself and leave the lad tried and tempered!" he said half aloud, quoting from Governor Bradford's well-meant homily on the subject of Rufus. "Would it were no worse, that I could lay the words hopefully to store and await the day of repentance and turning! But the Governor little knows how deeply the canker is rooted. Merciful God, must the sins of the fathers be irrevocably visited on the innocent children

even unto the third and fourth generations? Have I offended thee in that I have dared to defy the Eternal Law and snatch a brand from the burning? Nay, surely my poor labors must seem good in thy sight. I'll bear the cross, though it utterly crush me and bow me to the ground ——"

His lips moved inaudibly and were still. For a long time he lay with nearly closed eyes, as one in a trance. Vision upon vision rose before him. He was gazing across a terraced lawn to a stately Elizabethan mansion that reared its turrets to a peerless Hampshire sky; was standing among nodding flowers in the garden of a tiny game-keeper's cottage, nestled in the shadow of a deep, dark wood; gun on shoulder and dog at heels, he was striding knee-deep amid fern and bracken, over the great, rolling deer-park. He heard a baby's artless prattle, the light, careless laughter of an English —— But what was that?

Roused from his dreams, dragged back to the bitterness of reality, Jennicom lifted himself on one elbow. It was still ringing in his ears—a splitting, rending noise as of wood

and iron fiercely wrenched apart, and yet he was not convinced that it was anything more than imagination. He listened for several minutes, all his senses on the alert. Ah! there it was again—the same harsh, tearing sound, and unmistakably from the floor below. Footsteps grew audible, receded and died away.

"The rogue was listening," thought Jennicom, "to make sure that he raised no alarm. But what wicked design brings him hither?"

Young Joshua Tybbott, after letting his aunt into the street, had barred the gate and then climbed over it. But the house door had unavoidably been left undone, it seeming unlikely that any peril could threaten the sick man, and some evil-minded person, having scaled the palisade, had entered the humble abode that it was supposed to protect.

So Jennicom reasoned, and as he had never known the meaning of cowardice, he at once prepared with a wrathful heart to smite the daring intruder. The candle had quite expired, and there was not another one in the room. But the darkness was all the better suited to Jennicom's purpose. The weakness

of fever was forgotten, unfelt, as he reached for his clothes at the foot of the bed, and drew on his breeches and thick stockings. He rose to his feet, buttoned a cloak about his shoulders, and took a primed and loaded pistol from a shelf by the window.

From the top of the ladder he could perceive a glimmer of light off below him, and hear a faint noise. He descended to the ground floor, the wind drowning the creak of the wooden rungs, and then, having gone cautiously forward a few paces, he saw where the light came from.

An exclamation, barely stifled in time, was forced to his lips. The next instant he had flung open the shattered door of the closet, and was standing on the threshold of his jealously-guarded shrine of mysteries.

"Pybus Foulfoot!" he cried in a terrible voice.

The unexpected sight of the tall, gaunt old Puritan, the weapon he held and the rage that flashed from his eyes, was too much for the nerves of the red-bearded man, lately known as Barbe Rouge, who had been sitting on a stool, deeply absorbed in a cumbrous

"NOW, HANDS UP," SAID JENNICOM

leather-bound and brass-clamped volume, when thus taken by surprise. He sprang erect, letting the book fall to the floor with a crash. He reached quickly for the weapons at his belt, but a peep into the wide-mouthed muzzle of Jennicom's pistol caused him to think better of his intention.

"Truly, sir, I meant no harm," he whined, his lips twitching with fear and his eyes rolling till the whites showed. "'Tis ever my misfortune ——"

"You've broken jail?" demanded Jennicom.

"You need hardly ask that," was the sullen reply.

"'Twould have been wiser to stop behind bolts and bars, mayhap. Out with your weapons—grasp them by blade and barrel, and put them down beside you."

Foulfoot, his movements intently watched, reluctantly placed a pistol and an ugly-looking knife on the low stool from which he had risen, and then obeyed the command to step a couple of paces to the left.

"Now, hands up," said Jennicom. "Lift a finger, and I'll shoot you dead."

"If you'll hear my explanation, Anthony ——"

"Not that name, you dog."

"Master Jennicom, then."

"Ay, that's better."

The lanthorn, standing on the shelf with steel and tinder-box beside it, shone brightly about the cramped little closet that had boasted such unusual fastenings. A short bar of iron, taken from the fireplace, lay on the floor to tell how the destruction had been wrought. The English chest of carved oak was between the two men, and its priceless lock, like the one on the door, had been ruthlessly shattered. The contents were in confusion, and on the reverse of the lid, which had been turned back on its hinges, stood two bulky canvas bags. The strings of both had been cut, and the gleam of gold coins was visible within. All this Jennicom noted with one eye, as it were, while not for an instant did his observation of the captive relax, or the hand that held the pistol waver ever so slightly. The fallen volume lying with pages open—his cherished diary—was the last thing that drew his attention. His nostrils quivered, his eyes

flashed; for a moment his rage was almost uncontrollable. Then his features settled to a fierce, determined expression that was far more dangerous than open wrath, and when he spoke, ending the brief pause, it was in a firm, cold voice that bit like an acid.

"What brought you here?" he inquired.

"Importunate need, sir, as you may suppose," Foulfoot declared. "The necessities of a desperate, hunted man, who's more sinned against than sinning. 'Twas ever thus, if you'll remember. A godly life, though my bent was all that way, has been denied me from childhood. I was weak, easily led; temptations beset my path. You alone showed me kindness——" His voice faltered. He seemed to be overcome by genuine emotion.

"Go on," commanded Jennicom, with a glance of fiery scorn. "Make haste and finish your false tale."

"I humbly protest, Master Jennicom, that I speak the truth. But to have done quickly, I've long wished to break away from the evil crew among whom my lot has been cast for many weeks, and to-night, when we four were

rescued from jail by a party of our mates, I seized the opportunity and gave my companions the slip. I came straight here to beg you for a small sum of money to pay my passage to the Virginias by some vessel, but finding the door unbarred, and being loth to rouse you at such an hour ——"

"Ay, so you concluded to help yourself," Jennicom interrupted, with a grim laugh. "I'll hear no more—you've only wasted breath as it is. Pick up that book."

The pistol kept in line with Foulfoot as he stooped for the heavy volume, which he closed and put on the lid of the chest.

"How far have you read?" demanded Jennicom.

"I've dipped into it far enough," was the significant reply, given in an altered and aggressive voice. "'Twas a vast surprise to me, Master Jennicom, I'll confess. I had always believed ——"

"Never mind what you believed. I'm to understand, then, that you're aware of my reasons for taking another name when I left England for the Low Countries and America?"

"Ay, the child. 'The brand from the

burning,'" and Foulfoot laughed—a low, impudent laugh that was like to have cost him his life then and there. Hot rage leaped to Jennicom's face, and his finger trembled on the trigger of his weapon.

"Dog!" he snarled.

"Come, come, Master Bennet—nay, I mean Jennicom, I'm in a reasonable mood, and you should be in the same," Foulfoot said hastily. "Why, you've no cause for alarm. I know how to hold my tongue—you'll not deny that. Look you, give me one of your bags of gold, let me be off without further delay, and I'll swear to be silent evermore, swear to never trouble you again."

"Ay, as you swore in the past, each time I parted with money—craven that I was to do so! Can I trust you now?"

"That you can. I'm for the Virginias, New Amsterdam, anywhere but New England—would I be mad enough to venture back here?"

"Perhaps not—at least not until you'd bled Vaylmer Laplash to the utmost. I can read the very depths of your evil soul."

Foulfoot, unmasked by the accusation, was

struck dumb. He could not hide his confusion.

"You scoundrel, d'you suppose I'm crazy enough to let you go free—you who've been the curse of my existence?" roared Jennicom. "Can'st think that I'd fill your pockets with gold and turn you loose, with the certainty that you'd carry your information to other ears? Trust you? Why, I'd rather put faith in a venomous reptile. Nay, I'm going to kill you."

"Would you murder me?" gasped Foulfoot, white to the lips.

"Up with your hands! Don't move."

"Spare my life, good Master Jennicom. I'm not fit to die."

"Die you shall," cried Jennicom, his voice rising to a shrill pitch of fury, "and the law will hold me blameless."

He meant what he said. For the moment he was a mad fanatic—this austere, religious-minded man who for years had set a high example to the community of Plymouth. Weighed in the balance, judged by the memory of the persecution and threats he had endured in the past, by the crying need to

safeguard the one secret of his life, the deed he was about to commit in cold blood seemed just and righteous. He felt that he was the chosen instrument of God.

"Let me pray," begged Foulfoot, cunningly.

"Be quick—I'll grant you a minute."

The pistol, though it shook in the lean brown hand that clasped it, swerved not from its deadly aim. Jennicom, his cheeks flushed and burning—for the fever was on him again—relentlessly counted the seconds. Ten—fifteen—twenty —— He turned his head slightly, listening to a great noise of shouting that had suddenly originated in the direction of the jail. And just then, wrought to desperation, Foulfoot half-crouched with a lightning-like movement and as quickly threw himself forward. There was a terrific crash and a spurting jet of fire, but he felt neither the sting of the powder in his face, nor the cut of the ball through his left arm, as he caught his would-be murderer and clung to him. They reeled together across the open lid of the chest, which snapped with their weight and poured out the contents of the money-bags in a tinkling, golden shower.

CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH THERE'S A TRAGIC END TO A MAN-HUNT

THE heavy discharge of the pistol filled the closet with smoke, and the lanthorn, which had very nearly been extinguished by the concussion, shed but a dim and murky light on the struggle. They had scarcely elbow-room, the two desperate men, as they writhed and twisted in the narrow space between the end wall and the chest, scattering the coins over the floor. Jennicom, unflinching in his fell purpose, held with a dogged, strenuous grip, so that the younger man, who thought only of escape directly he had drawn the pistol fire without serious result and over-thrown his foe, was in little less precarious plight than before. In vain, though he was uppermost, did he exert the whole strength of his wiry, sinewy frame.

"Submit," panted Jennicom. "You'll not

elude me—'tis Heaven's decree that you die in your sins."

"Unloose me, let me go!" screamed Foulfoot. "D'you hear? The jail delivery is discovered. Your shot has drawn them, and they're coming to take me."

For the time being he had forgotten that he was wounded, was unconscious of the burning pain and the dripping blood. The noise of men shouting rang in his ears, growing more distinct. Wild with terror, he made one last effort. The fierce, jerking strain told, and wrenching himself free he sprang to his feet with a hoarse cry. But as he was in the very act of leaping toward the open door his ankle was clutched in a tight grip and down he went headlong, striking and upsetting the stool and hurling the weapons that were on it to the floor.

The rattle of the knife was sweetest music to Foulfoot, who was not even stunned by the fall. It lay within easy reach, the steel flashing in his eyes. His fingers tightened on the haft, and rising quickly to his feet he swung round to find himself confronted by Jennicom.

"Nay, 'tis useless," cried the old man, blind to his danger. "Your punishment is ordained."

"Ordained? I'll escape over your dead body," vowed Foulfoot, with a grim laugh. "You shall have such mercy as you would have shown to me, Anthony Bennet."

With that he struck swiftly and unerringly, and Jennicom, though he thrust upward to seize the descending arm with both hands, failed to do more than lessen the impetus of the blow and shift it a little to one side. The knife sank deep into his shoulder and whipped out again, a crimson stain instantly marking the wound and soaking through shirt and cloak. A brief struggle followed, Foulfoot seeking to get control of the weapon in order to deliver a fatal and finishing stroke, while Jennicom, his face deathly pale, battling against the numbing weakness that was stealing his strength away, clung desperately to the other's right arm. To and fro they swayed, both bleeding freely, Foulfoot's left hand half-encircling his adversary's throat.

"Help! help!" cried Jennicom, thinking he

had heard some one burst into the house from the garden.

He was not mistaken, as it happened. There was a rush of footsteps, a shout, and on the threshold of the closet appeared Rufus, not a little startled by the scene that met his eyes. His sturdy figure barred the exit, much to the dismay of Foulfoot, who had that instant succeeded in wrenching himself from the old man's hold, though in the final effort a turn of his wrist caused him to drop the knife. Jennicom staggered and fell, but not before he had recognized his son.

"Rufus, stop him!" he cried feebly.

Foulfoot realized that to hesitate was to be lost. Casting swiftly about him for the knife, he espied his pistol lying at his feet. That was better, he thought, and in a trice he had snatched it up and taken aim at Rufus. A stunning explosion followed, but what with the lad's agile move to one side, and the fact that the weapon, chancing to be over-loaded, kicked with violence, the charge passed harmlessly through the doorway and penetrated the opposite wall.

Rufus, bewildered by his narrow escape, was

the next instant hurled off his feet; for Foulfoot, immediately he fired, had leaped blindly forward amid the dense cloud of smoke. Down went the lad, and as he lay sprawling on the floor of the outer room he heard the vicious swish of the empty pistol as it cut the air in search of him, and then was kicked and trampled as his enemy stumbled past him.

But Foulfoot was in such frantic haste to get away that he thought of nothing else, and when Rufus, catching the sounds of retreat, pulled himself erect and groped dizzily across the room to the open door, he was just in time to see the ruffian's shadowy figure dart out by the gate, which he had previously taken the precaution to unbar. He would have been wholly invisible, as he fled into the night, but for a red, wavering glare that was rapidly approaching along the street. A tumult of voices near by smothered the clamor that was rising from other quarters.

Lost to all sense of personal interest, forgetting for the moment that escape meant hardly less to him than it did to Foulfoot, Rufus shouted at the top of his voice. That impulsive act, and a brief interval of vacillation,

sealed his folly. A group of armed men, carrying lanthorns and blazing pine-knots, suddenly appeared at the gateway, and pouring noisily across the garden they entered the house. A dozen or more they numbered, including several musketeers from the fort, Seth Dymett the jailer, and a neighbor by the name of Ben Gunnery.

"What's wrong here?" the latter demanded, as the flood of light weirdly illuminated the room. "Who fired those two shots? Why, comrades, I'll be hanged if it ain't young Jennicom!"

"We're sure of one capture, then," cried Dymett. "I dare say, my lad, that you and your fellow-rogues didn't count on the sentries being relieved so soon."

"Rogues if you like, but I had naught to do with them," vowed Rufus, wincing under the jailer's heavy hand. "I'll go with you, Master Dymett," he added huskily, "but first —my father! Oh! he may be dead."

He shook the hand off, and quickly ran to the closet, where as many of the party as could find space crowded about the doorway. The scene within was ghastly, numerous

bloody footprints on the floor telling of the desperate struggle for life. Jennicom, his clothing spattered with red stains, was in a sitting posture, his back propped against the wall. The contents of the money-bags lay around him unheeded, but he had rescued the leather-bound volume, which he held tightly, half-fearfully, to his breast, as he looked up with an ashen-gray countenance to the knot of eager, curious faces.

"Foulfoot?" he muttered faintly. "You've got him?"

"Foulfoot?" half a dozen voices echoed in surprise. "Has the knave been here?" cried Dymett.

"You've narrowly missed him," replied Rufus; and in a few sentences he told what little he knew, thereby clearing himself of ugly suspicions that were already rife. "I'm glad I came back, though it's cost me my freedom," he went on, doggedly. "I meant to escape, and I could have done so easily enough, for I had passed the house and was nearly to the forest. Then I heard the pistol-shot—ay, and the alarm as well. But I didn't stop to think twice."

"You've got pluck, anyway," said Dymett. "'Twas lucky you returned, for the scoundrel was bent on murder no less than robbery. He cherishes an old grudge against Jennicom."

Rufus had meanwhile knelt by his father's side, and several others gathered about him. Jennicom still clasped his precious diary, staring with a vacant, bewildered expression, and groaning deeply from time to time, as rough but careful hands removed his cloak and loosed his shirt.

"He's been stabbed in the shoulder," exclaimed Ben Gunnery. "'Tis a deep cut, and must be painful, but he'll mend of it in a fortnight, I'll warrant. The first call is to stanch the blood and put on a dressing, and after that he'll need to lie quietly in bed."

Seth Dymett began to rake the scattered gold into a heap. "I'll see to this for you, Master Jennicom," he said. "And shall I relieve you of that book?"

"I'll take it, father," offered Rufus.

"Nay, I'll not part with it," vowed Jennicom, speaking with difficulty, and in a dull, hollow voice. "Tell me, lad, are they seek-

ing for Foulfoot? Better let him go. He'll not trouble these parts again."

"Let him go?" echoed Ben Gunnery. "He's wounded, lad, you told us?—shot through the arm? And he will be losing blood in his flight, no doubt. Well, then, I'm a Dutchman if I don't believe we'll overhaul the fellow yet. You know that queer-breed hound of mine, the one I bought of a Bristol skipper, who swore he'd had him second-hand out of the Duke of Dorset's kennels. He's a very wolf for tracking ——"

"That's as may be," interrupted a musketeer, "but the rain will have spoiled the scent."

"Rain or no rain, the trick's worth a trial," interposed Dymett; and the weight of his opinion silenced further criticism and carried unanimous approval. An exception, perhaps, was Carver Jennicom, but he was too ill to protest; what his troubled eyes looked his lips could not interpret.

Ben Gunnery had no more than gone when Dame Tybbott arrived with her nephew, the commotion having roused them from sleep. Assured that his father was not seriously

hurt, and knowing that he would be well cared for, Rufus made a bold request of Seth Dymett.

"Let me go with you," he begged. "If Foulfoot's to be caught I'd like to help."

"If I did my duty I should clap you in irons and send you where you belong," the jailer answered severely, but"—he paused thoughtfully, "but if you'll promise to stick to me and come back to the house ——"

"I swear I will, and you can trust me," assured Rufus. "I will come back to the house," he added shrewdly, with a barely perceptible emphasis on the words.

"That'll do," said Dymett. "I'll take you with me."

Contrary to expectation Gunnery's hound Mayflower was to achieve a brilliant feat—success it can hardly be called, as will be seen. Almost at the start, within a short distance of the house, the animal swerved suddenly aside, sniffed the ground, and lifting his head poured a hoarse, long-drawn howl from the depths of his throat.

"Good dog," cried Gunnery. "He's got it."

"'Twould seem so," assented Dymett, hold-

ing his lanthorn down. "Here's a patch of blood on the grass, right enough."

They hurried on, Mayflower leading at rope's end, his muzzle steadily to earth. The forest loomed like a wall, and he plunged into the curtain of foliage.

"Best slip his leash," urged one of the party, "else we'll not gain on the quarry."

This suggestion presented difficulties, which Gunnery was broaching when at a careless moment he allowed the rope to be jerked through his fingers. Away shot the hound, unerringly pursuing the scent, and after him trailed the eager searchers, their lanthorns and torches flaring picturesquely amid the windings of the heavy timber and undergrowth.

The chase proved to be neither long nor devious, and though the dog kept far ahead, his yelping rang so loud and clear that the men were never for a moment at fault as to their direction. Half a mile due north, the same east by northeast, and then the roar of breakers grew audible above the whistle of the gale.

"We'll have him!" panted Gunnery. "We're getting close on. D'you hear?"

Seth Dymett was the first to issue from the rim of the forest, with Rufus a good second. They called lustily to the others as they ran down the rugged, uneven beach, for by the glow of the jailer's torch they could see a narrow peninsula of rocks jutting out between lashing waves and creamy foam, and at the farther end, perched on a crag at the base of which the hound was baying vociferously, a human figure was vaguely outlined against the blackness of the night.

"There he is!" cried Dymett.

"Ay, there's the rogue," echoed Rufus. "And most neatly trapped."

Alas! their satisfaction was short-lived. Pybus Foulfoot—it was undoubtedly he—was visible one instant, gone the next. There was a hoarse shout of defiance, a leap and a splash, and the point of rock was empty. Canine grief echoed dismally along the iron-bound coast as Mayflower, robbed of his legitimate prey, lifted his voice in quavering, prolonged howls of disappointment.

The rest of the men gathered about the spot, and several scrambled precariously to the end of the peninsula, where there was no

hiding-place large enough to have sheltered a cat. They thrust torches almost into the yeasty spindrift, flashed them over the deep, wind-tossed waters that encircled the little cape, but of the daring swimmer there was not a trace. If his head was above the surface, and he was battling for life with the waves, he was already farther away than the light could reach.

"He was always a tricky scamp," declared Gunnery. "He'll swim out and around, and then watch his chance to slip in."

"He can't keep afloat long, that's certain," replied Rufus.

"We'll get him if he comes ashore," said Dymett, adding brief and hasty instructions.

Leaving two men to watch in the vicinity of the rocks, the others scattered in both directions. For nearly an hour they lined a half-mile of the coast, going to and fro, making the night lurid with the glare of lanthorns and blazing pine-knots, and peering with hands to eyes out upon the black, angry waste of waters, while the intelligent hound ranged back and forth with his nose to the boiling sands. To have slipped through the

cordon without being seen was impossible, and assuredly the fugitive made no such attempt.

Realizing that the vigil was fruitless, and that to persist in it longer would be only a waste of time, Seth Dymett finally called the men together.

On the way back, as might have been observed, Dymett's keen eyes never let Rufus out of his sight for a moment. At the edge of the settlement, which was in a state of noisy confusion, the party divided, the jailer and several companions stopping at Jennicom's gate, while the rest hurried off to learn if there was any news of the other free-booters.

"You shall have a word with your father, if you like," Dymett said to his young charge, "and then——" He jerked his thumb toward the town. "You understand, my lad, that I've got to do my duty," he added.

Rufus made no reply. With a heavy heart, but clinging to a ray of hope that had as yet assumed no tangible shape, he entered the house. Dame Tybbott, who was coaxing water to boil on a fire of damp wood, glanced at the lad with curiosity and pity.

"The worshipful Governor has been and gone," she exclaimed, "and he sent a box of healing ointment by Master Brewster. Terrible doings, indeed! Good lack, 'tis a mercy we've not all been murdered in our sleep ——"

"Is that you, Rufus?" Humfrey's voice called from above. "Your father desires to see you at once. He would speak with you privately."

"Go up, lad," said Dymett, hesitating long enough to catch approving nods from his companions. "Shalt have five minutes."

Rufus slowly ascended the ladder, and there was awkward constraint on both sides as he greeted the boyish friend with whom he had quarreled so bitterly. Humfrey, who was alone with the patient, withdrew to the door.

Jennicom, his wound having been bathed and dressed, had been carried up to his bed, where he lay with hot and fevered cheeks tossing restlessly. From under his pillow peeped the back of the leather-bound diary. He looked at Rufus without anger or resentment, with a strange, wistful tenderness.

"My boy, they've not caught him?" he asked quickly.

"Nay, father, he is dead."

"Dead?" gasped the old man, laying a trembling hand on the lad's arm. "Dead, you say? There's no mistake?"

"None," Rufus assured him. "Foulfoot was drowned. We drove him into the sea, where he perished among the rocks and waves."

"Thank God!" murmured Jennicom. "His ways are best."

His lips moved as if in prayer, and with a quivering sigh he closed his eyes. He was either asleep or in a stupor.

Though a little puzzled by the effect of his news, Rufus gave it but a passing thought. He had much else on his mind, and must act speedily. A lump rose to his throat as he bent over his father and kissed him on the forehead. Then, hastily discarding Laplash's gray laced coat, he put on an old jacket and hat of his own, taking them from a hook. A pistol lay on the shelf, together with powder-horn and bullet-pouch. He took possession of all three, stepped quickly across the room, and clapped a hand on Humfrey's shoulder, who turned with a start.

"What did Governor Bradford say?" Rufus asked coldly. "Will my father recover?"

"Why, he's in no danger," was the reply. "Careful nursing will put him on his feet in a week."

"You'll do what you can for him, Humfrey?"

"Be sure of that, Rufus."

"Then I shall leave him with less regret. One thing more. Tell me, has Sir Lanslott Charmion left Plymouth?"

"Ay, he sailed for Boston two days ago. But why do you ——"

"Good-bye," interrupted Rufus, "and wish me luck, if you will. As for our quarrel, 'twill mend with time. Remember me to Rose ——"

"Rufus, what does this mean?" Humfrey exclaimed.

"Hush! not a sound," Rufus answered fiercely, as he pushed the window open. "Would you betray me?"

"Not I," vowed Humfrey, with sudden comprehension. "Go, if you're determined on it. But first consider, I beg of you ——"

The words fell on deaf ears, for Rufus, having swung over the window ledge, had dropped lightly down to the garden. He darted out at the gate and around the house, paused for a moment to listen, and then ran at full speed through the darkness in the direction of the forest.

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH A PRETTY PLOT IS HATCHED WITHIN THE ADMIRAL BLAKE AT DORCHESTER

It was the 29th of July, and since early morning the day had been close and sultry, oppressive to man and beast alike with the heat of the ripe, full summertide.

A few yards beyond the northern edge of the straggling settlement of Dorchester, on the Boston road, the Admiral Blake looked toward the sea from a grove of pine-trees that girt it on sides and rear. It was a modest little inn with two projecting gables, and over its portals swung a much cracked and faded likeness of the doughty Elizabethan sea-warrior of Armada fame. It had recently changed hands for a mere song, and in place of the late owner, gone to Virginia to better his fortunes, we find Jarvis Story installed in the proud position of landlord. That worthy person, having incurred magisterial displeasure through the il-

legal meeting held at his house, and been mulcted in a heavy fine as well, had in high dudgeon turned his back on Boston and effected the purchase of the Admiral Blake, where he lived quite by himself.

At four o'clock Master Story was dozing in a big armchair with a yellow dog asleep beside him, and at ten past four to the minute he sprang suddenly to his feet, roused by the shrill barking of the animal and by cautious steps at the rear door. A quarter of an hour later he might have been observed to walk round the house to the front, his sleeves rolled up, an apron tied about his waist, and a very troubled expression on his perspiring face.

"'Tis piping hot," he told himself. For a moment, with lukewarm interest, he watched a vessel that had put into Dorchester Bay and appeared to be lowering part of her canvas; at another time the event would have wakened his curiosity. "Lack-a-day! what's to be done, what's to be done?" he muttered. "Ah, 'tis a pity. And I'm all in a pother over it."

A final squint up and down the lonely road, and he retraced his steps to the back of the

inn, from whence he presently appeared in the tap-room bearing a wooden tray.

To the left of the door and window was a sort of compartment, after the fashion of English taverns, formed by the two walls and a high-backed settle. Within this, his elbows resting on a small table and his chin propped in his hands, sat Rufus Jennicom. He looked weary and dejected, as in truth he was. For more than a week he had been wandering in the forest, subsisting chiefly on roots and berries, and making what shift he could at night —excepting a period of four days when he kept company with some Wampanoag Indians. Failing to discover any trace of Roger Williams, he had at length fallen back on another project he had in mind; in pursuance of which, reaching the outskirts of Dorchester that afternoon and driven by the pangs of hunger to the Admiral Blake, he had been vastly surprised to find in the landlord an old friend and one willing to aid him.

"Here's bread and cheese, and a venison-pasty," said Jarvis Story, as he placed the tray on the table; he had already listened to a brief account of the lad's adventures. "Nay,

I'll accept not a penny," he added, as Rufus drew several coins from his pocket. "I'm in a measure to blame for your troubles, since they began with that luckless meeting I persuaded you to attend. 'Tis a sad business, Master Jennicom."

"They're seeking for me, I dare say?" asked Rufus, who was making fierce inroads on the food and taking comfort therefrom.

"Ay, I'll not deny it. But you're safe enough for the present, I'll see to that. There are none hereabouts who would recognize you."

"I'm not going to be caught if I can help it," vowed Rufus, pulling a brave face. "Come, tell me the news, Master Story. My father ——"

"I heard yesterday that he was mending fast. As for Roger Williams, 'tis reported that he's gone back to his congregation at Salem, and that he's not to be disturbed so long as he holds his tongue. Indeed, the magistrates are most forbearing with him. I'd no such leniency shown to me."

"Nor should I receive any," said Rufus. "Roger Williams hath the power of disarm-

ing his enemies, which I can easily understand. But what of the bold freebooters?"

"Nothing is known of them," was the reply. "They're hundreds of miles away, be assured."

"I wish I was with them," Rufus cried recklessly; and his features settled into a hard and sullen expression. "Nay, I don't mean that," he went on, "but none the less I'm off for other parts at the first opportunity. They've driven me to it."

"Ay, that they have," assented the landlord, with a regretful shake of the head. "Were I a few years younger I'd be almost tempted to go with you—why, a man can't lay claim to his own soul in New England in these days. And where d'you propose to start from?"

"From Boston, if I can find a vessel," replied Rufus, who was unwilling to disclose his real intentions of obtaining a secret interview with Sir Lanslott Charmion. "I'll set out thither as soon as 'tis dark enough."

"Good luck go with you," said Jarvis Story, hiding a sense of selfish relief in that fervent expression. "While it seems in one way like running your head into a noose, on the other

hand Boston is the very last place where they'd think of looking ——" He broke off at that, and stared for a moment out of the window. "Strangers!" he exclaimed in a hoarse whisper. "They're coming here, no doubt. Stop where you are, lad, and be as quiet as a mouse. 'Twill be the best plan, for you've no time to make your escape. Not that you're in any hazard, for these will be but harmless sailormen fresh from shipboard. I'd forgotten the vessel lying yonder."

Hastily fetching a high settle from across the room, he put it down at a right angle to the other one, allowing but a narrow open space next the wall, and thus safeguarding the lad within by a fourth and additional barrier. An instant later voices and footsteps were heard outside, and the landlord stepped to the door to meet his guests.

By this time, leaving his meal unfinished, Rufus had prepared himself for an interval of silence and inaction, with his tired limbs stretched on the oaken bench and his back resting against the wall. By moving his head slightly he could command a limited view of the window, through which he saw the ap-

proach of three men. Two were common sailors, and as ill-looking fellows as one could find in a day's journey, but the third was a young man of a very different stamp, who carried his slim, wiry figure with an air of distinction. Though he was plainly attired in the manner of a ship's officer, though his hair was cut short and his face was clean-shaven, he could not deceive the sharp, boyish eyes that were covertly watching him. The first glimpse was enough for Rufus, and brought a quick throb to his heart and a flush to his cheeks.

"'Tis Dollier Le Casson," he vowed, "or else he hath a double. And that's not likely."

Suspicion promptly became a certainty. The sailors remained without, squatting on a seat to one side of the door, while their companion entered the inn and called for the landlord, and the voice was unmistakably Le Casson's, albeit he spoke with little trace of a French accent.

So the freebooters were not, after all, hundreds of miles from the New England settlements. Here was an interesting situation, rich in possible developments and mystery,

and Rufus, forgetting his troubles for the time-being, resolved to discover what was in the wind. Turning from the window he examined the high back of the settle on which he was resting, and as luck would have it he found at once, in a position that could not have been bettered, a knot-hole sufficiently large to afford a view from one eye.

Captain Le Casson was seated by a table near the middle of the tap-room, the fingers of one hand beating a restless tattoo on the polished surface of the wood, and his gaze was fixed on a couple of prints that hung on the opposite wall, when the landlord returned to him after serving the men outside.

"There's bread and cheese and meat to be had, sir," suggested Master Story, with a hope of further profit.

"I wish for nothing else," was the reply. "My good man, perchance a letter or a message has been received here for a certain Simon Raleigh."

"Nay, sir, neither word nor writing—at least not as yet. You're expecting the same? And at the Admiral Blake?"

"At the Admiral Blake," assented Le Cas-

son. "There's no mistake about that. But I've arrived too early, it seems."

"You will be the gentleman named, sir?" inquired Master Story, who had an inquisitive bent of mind, and was anxious to learn as much as possible concerning this unusual type of customer.

"I am Simon Raleigh," Le Casson told him carelessly, "skipper of the trading-vessel Due Return, which dropped anchor an hour ago in yonder bay. And 'twas a business appointment, made with an acquaintance of these parts, that brought me to your house. My good fellow, I'll wait."

"If I can be of any assistance to you, sir——"

"You may take your score out of this," Le Casson broke in curtly, as he flung a silver coin on the table, "and keep something for your own refreshment."

"Thank you, sir," said the landlord.

He was fumbling in his pocket for change when a rapid, thudding noise, swelling in the sultry distance, came clearly to the occupants of the room.

"D'you hear that?" cried Le Casson, start-

ing to his feet and clapping a hand on the short cutlass that he wore.

"Hoof-beats," Jarvis Story declared. "Some one's riding in hot haste, I'm thinking."

He ran to the door, followed by Le Casson, and they and the two sailors turned eager eyes Bostonward, whence a horseman was approaching at a gallop. He tightened rein as he neared the inn, and checked his panting, lathering steed alongside the little group. Rufus, peering cautiously from the window, wondered if the arrival could mean mischief to himself.

"Ned Wilder!" exclaimed the landlord, recognizing an old friend. "Oons! man, what's amiss?"

"It's come at last," cried the rider. "Bloody war with the Pequots, sure as fate. They've murdered poor John Oldham."

"Where? When?" gasped Master Story.

"Off Block Island, nine days ago."

"Alack! poor John," cried Master Story. "He was a worthy fellow, and deserved a better end."

"He'll be well-avenged, I'll warrant," replied the horseman. "But I must be riding

on to spread the news of a meeting that's to be held in Boston this very night, the Governor and magistrates presiding, to plan immediate operations against the Pequots. A force is to be mustered and despatched to Block Island, and Captain Underhill is enrolling names already. I've just left Pinewood, where I saw Mr. Christopher Gardiner and his guest, Sir Lanslott Charmion. They're both setting off at once to lend their influence and presence to the council."

At this Le Casson, who had listened indifferently to the account of John Oldham's murder, betrayed sudden evidence of surprise and interest.

Ned Wilder straightened in the saddle, then bent down again with one hand in his doublet.

"Why, I'd almost forgotten," he said. "Jarvis, d'you happen to know any one answering to the name of Raleigh?"

"That's my name—Simon Raleigh," exclaimed Le Casson, starting forward.

"Then here's a letter for you, sir, which I'm commissioned to deliver by a gentleman in Boston."

The next instant Wilder had gathered up the lines and was galloping off to bear the news to Dorchester and other coast settlements. The two sailors sat down on the bench outside, and Jarvis Story and Le Casson entered the inn, the latter humming a light air as he glanced at the sealed missive for which he had been waiting. Rufus, who had seen and overheard all, crept back to his corner. He clenched his fists in a spasm of impotent regret, and bitter tears were very near to filling his eyes.

"What a chance I've thrown away!" he thought. "There will be war with the Pequots now, and I might have turned soldier, and seen some sharp fighting, without leaving the colonies. But 'tis no use wishing things were different. If I went to Boston tonight, and offered to volunteer, they would only clap me in jail for my pains."

Such folly was not to be dreamed of, the lad decided. War or no war, he was a fugitive from the law, and had forfeited his right to shoulder a musket in defense of the New England settlements. Presently, in a sullen mood, he resumed his vigil at the knot-hole.

He was sleepy and tired, and the strain of keeping awake and on the alert was beginning to tell on him.

Le Casson, who was in his former place, had finished reading the letter. It lay open before him, and he was tapping it with his fingers, his expression absent and meditative, as he leaned back in his chair with his legs stretched under the table. Suddenly he sat up, his lips moving and a flash of determination in his eyes. He called the landlord from the next room.

"The horseman mentioned a certain Christopher Gardiner," he said listlessly. "I knew a gentleman of that name in England, and I've a fancy it may be the same."

"Very likely, sir," replied Jarvis Story. "Mr. Gardiner came out from London three months ago, to better his health, I'm told. He bought a house of Governor Winthrop close by here—less than a mile up the Boston road—which he calls Pinewood. He lives in some state, and at present he's entertaining Sir Lanslott Charmion, the King's deputy. Perchance you're acquainted with the latter gentleman as well."

"Nay, I've not that honor," said Le Casson. "My good man, I'll trouble you for writing materials," he added.

"You shall have them, sir," replied the landlord, who was anxious to be rid of his customer.

Having brought quills and paper, an ink-horn and a pounce-box, he took himself out of the room. Le Casson, satisfied that he was alone, fell to his task at once. He wrote very slowly and with minute pains, casting a glance toward the adjoining room from time to time, and most frequently pausing to refer to the letter he had received, which was spread open at his elbow. It might have been supposed that he was making a copy of it, though such was very far from being the case.

Meanwhile, from behind the high-backed settle, Rufus kept watch until fatigue proved stronger than curiosity. His eyes closed, his head sank into the corner of the wall, and almost instantly he was asleep.

CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH CONSTABLE BLADES IS VERY MUCH UPSET

Rufus was rudely awakened by a hand tugging at his arm. He sat upright, stiff and cramped in every limb, unable at first to collect his thoughts. Then the creaking of the sign-board outside the inn, as it rocked in a cooling breeze, stirred vivid recollections to life; he became aware of the landlord's presence beside him.

"I'm awake, Master Story," he murmured drowsily. "What's o'clock? Where's Captain Le Casson?"

"Where's who?"

"I mean Simon Raleigh. Has he gone?"

"You're in a muddle, lad. Ay, the fine gentleman went off before sundown—he and his scrubby pair of sea-dogs. What brought them to Dorchester? A queer sort of skipper to command an English trading vessel, I vow. Why, I caught him gibbering to himself in a

language that sounded mightily like French. However, that's neither here nor there. To come to the point, the night is falling, you've a clear coast, and 'tis time you thought of starting on your way. That is, if you're still in the mind for Boston."

"Which I am, Master Story," Rufus answered. He stepped to the window and looked out. The shadows under the pine-trees were black by contrast with the open road, where the rising moon was already casting a silvery glow.

"'Twill be a large meeting," continued the landlord. "The men of Dorchester, and many from beyond, straggled past long since. 'Tis a wonder you were not wakened, for some of them marched to the tap of drums. The town will be full to overflowing."

"All the better if it is," said Rufus. "I'll have less to fear in a crowd. And the sooner I get to Boston ——"

"You shall set off directly. But first, my lad, will you tell me what you can make of this?" handing him a letter. "'Tis the same that Wilder brought for Mr. Simon Raleigh. He thrust it into his doublet, whence it must

have fallen out again, for I found it lying beneath the table after he had gone. I tried to read it, but bless you, I'm not enough of a scholar for that, being hard put to spell even a printed word. Wait a minute, and I'll fetch a light."

"Will it be safe?" asked Rufus.

"Ay, there's no one about."

So Jarvis Story believed, but it happened that he was wrong. He moved the settle away from the end of the compartment, Rufus following at his heels, and was on the point of closing the inn-door when the dark figure of a man suddenly blocked the opening and advanced into the tap-room.

"How are you, Jarvis?" was his familiar greeting. "Just closing up, eh? Well, I'll not detain you long."

"Elias Blades!" exclaimed the landlord, in a voice that trembled a little. "What's brought you at this hour?"

"The behest of the law, Jarvis, else I should be at the town-meeting. I'm here in consequence of a rumor that reached Boston this afternoon to the effect—but who's with you, may I ask?"

There was a moment of breathless silence, for Master Story was speechless with fear and consternation, and then, as Rufus slipped back a pace or two with the intention of making a dash to the rear, Blades sprang forward and seized him by the arm.

"Not so fast, my friend," he cried. "Your actions are suspicious. Come, let's have a look at your face."

The lad submitted quietly, and offered no resistance until he had been drawn to the open door, when by a fierce jerk he tore his arm loose and darted over the threshold. But a lusty shout at his ear, and the rush of feet immediately behind him, gave warning, before he was six yards from the inn, that not by speed alone could he hope to evade recapture. A doubtful stratagem flashed to his mind, and was as quickly put to test. Swerving slightly from his course he checked himself, wheeled half-round, and thrust one leg out in front of the hotly-pursuing constable, who tripped headlong over it and measured his length on the grass. He was a portly man, and came down with a thud that knocked the breath from his body. His

wheezy grunt provoked an irresistible peal of laughter from Rufus, who, not waiting to see the full effects of the fall, sped rapidly along the bridle-path in the direction of Dorchester.

"Help! Murder! Blood and fury!" bellowed Elias Blades, between gasps. "'Tis young Jennicom—stop him—in the name of the law. Where are you, Jarvis? You skulking dog—you abettor of felons—lend a hand, or I'll pound you purple."

The flow of language was if anything on the increase when Rufus, from a distance of fifty yards, stopped in his tracks and looked back. He glimpsed Master Story and the constable, the latter by now on his feet, standing in the moonlight under the sign of the Admiral Blake; and then, waving his hat at them, he leisurely stepped into the borders of the forest.

But directly the foliage had closed over him, hiding him from view, the lad's indifference turned to strenuous action. Already, since the flight began, he had settled just what he was going to do. This plan, evolved from stress of altered circumstances, seemed good to him; and more than that, he felt

confident that he could carry it out with little or no difficulty.

He ran very swiftly among the trees, keeping near to and parallel with the road, which a few yards farther on turned so sharply as to carry it out of sight of the inn. Here, within a short distance of the houses of Dorchester, Rufus slipped across to the east and seaward side, first making sure that no person was visible in either direction. He was now in a lonely tract of rocks and scrubby bushes that lay between the highway and the coast, and afforded plenty of thick cover, should he be sought for there. It was unlikely, however, that he would be, for he had doubled back only twenty yards or so when he heard voices and footsteps approaching from the direction of the inn. Crouching low in a thicket, he overheard a brief and pleasing fragment of conversation, as Master Story and his companion hurried by the spot, and so near that they might almost have touched him.

"Make haste, you lout," urged Blades. "Run ahead and give the alarm. I'll want at least a dozen men for the pursuit."

"I doubt if there will be half so many left

in the village," replied Master Story, in a grumbling tone. "Anyway, you'll never find the lad in the forest—not if you had two-score to help you."

"If I lose him 'twill be your fault," the constable cried savagely. "You've served me a pretty trick, and be assured that Governor Vane shall know how you harbored and aided ——"

The voices sank to a murmur as the two passed on, and a little later, when Rufus had gone a considerable distance in the opposite direction, he heard a hue and cry far to the rear. It caused him no uneasiness, however, for he knew that his ruse had been a success.

"They won't come this way," he told himself, "and while they are searching the woods I shall be snugly hidden on board the Due Return; that is, if nothing unforeseen turns up. After what has happened already, it would be more than risky to venture into Boston, or to try to see Sir Lanslott Charmion. And now that Pybus Foulfoot is dead, and no longer in the reckoning, Vaylmer Laplash is the man to help me. I'm not over-anxious to

join the freebooters, but it's either that or be caught, so here goes."

The future must take care of itself, he decided, as he pushed on among the rocks and bushes, steering as straight a course as possible for the landing-place at Dorchester Bay. He quickened his steps, fearing lest the vessel should set sail without him ; but presently, on a sudden impulse, he pulled up in a sandy combe and took from his pocket the letter which Jarvis Story had given to him.

" I'll do well to see what this relates to," he thought. " 'Twas no simple errand, surely, that brought the Due Return to these parts and sent Dollier Le Casson ashore under a false name."

The moon was shining brightly overhead, and by the silvery glow he was able to decipher the greater portion of the missive, which was written in a large hand on one side of the paper. It lacked formal beginning and signature, and ran as follows, except where in places the ink was pale and illegible :

" King's man is—at Dorchester, but have just learned that he's expected in Boston to attend a—this evening. So shall wait to

beard him, and press with all ardor—though with small hopes, I confess. 'Tis midsummer madness, indeed, but by hook or by crook, Dollier, I must—my sweet maid. Be cautious, and do nothing that may rouse suspicion. A boat, sent across at midnight to—will find me waiting. If I come not you'll know the enterprise—landed me—bolts and bars."

Seating himself upon a flat stone, Rufus gave his whole mind to the problem that had been thrust upon him at such an awkward moment. He reread the letter and put it carefully away in his pocket.

"It might be more to the point," he reflected, "but 'tis plain enough so far as it goes. Vaylmer Laplash is the writer, and he is now in Boston to see Sir Lanslott Charmion, by whom is meant the 'King's man.' The 'sweet maid' is of course Mistress Charmion, and she is threatened with some mischief, which 'tis my duty to frustrate if possible." He took but a short time to consider, then rose to his feet. His choice was made, and unselfishly. "I'll have no dealings with Vaylmer Laplash and his lawless crew," he

vowed. "I'm for Pinewood, there to lie in hiding by the roadside till Sir Lanslott returns to-night. Come what may I'll give him the letter and a warning, though 'tis more likely to cost me my freedom than to end in a safe passage aboard the Marygold when she sails from Boston."

That Annis Charmion might be in any immediate peril did not for an instant occur to the lad. He altered his course a little, and went leisurely on in a northwesterly direction, until he judged that he was in the vicinity of Mr. Christopher Gardiner's residence. And then, as he was about to swing off to the left to reconnoitre the road, his attention was arrested for a moment by a vision that was as startling as it was unexpected. Across a moonlit glade, fifty yards or so straight ahead of him, passed two slim, girlish figures, half-muffled in cloaks. Gliding from shadow to shadow, they briefly appeared and were gone.

Rufus stood rubbing his eyes, well-nigh persuaded that it was all a delusion, until he suddenly remembered the scene at the inn—the letter that Dollier Le Casson had written with such slow pains. Here was enough to

waken his fears, though it gave him but the barest inkling of the truth. He hastened to the spot where the figures had vanished, and was in time to catch the flutter of a skirt at a distance to the right. In this direction a faintly-marked path led seaward, and at once he struck into it.

"I'll follow them," he decided. "Either there's treachery afoot to-night, or 'tis an affair that I've no call to meddle with. But I had best make certain one way or t'other."

He still retained the pistol he had secured the night he escaped from his father's house, and it was now at his belt, charged and primed. For a quarter of an hour he pressed on, creeping warily among the stones and scrub, and getting never a glimpse of the objects of his pursuit. At length, finding himself near the shore, he stopped in some doubt. Through the leaves he saw the spars and rigging of a vessel lying out on the bay. He could hear nothing at first save the gentle wash of the tide, and was in a mind to abandon the concern, thinking he had gone astray, when the bushes rustled and swayed close by.

"Art sure this is the spot, Joan?" asked a

low, sweet voice that the lad immediately recognized.

"Ay, mistress, 'tis here the boats land," was the reply.

The next instant a piercing scream suddenly stifled, and sounds of a violent scuffle, brought Rufus upon the scene in two strides. Bursting into a sandy open space within a few yards of the beach, he saw by the bright moonlight Annis Charmion and a girl-companion struggling in the grasp of three sailors. Rufus sprang forward with a shout. The sailors, taken by surprise, stopped and turned. In a moment Rufus reached the man who held Annis, and sent him sprawling. Then he leveled his pistol at the others.

"Let the maid go, at once," he cried. The two ruffians, cowed by his weapon, fell back and released their captive.

"Quick, run, run!" cried Rufus to the two girls, pointing to the way he had come. "I will hold them until you are safe on the high-road. Run!"

"Come, Joan." Annis seized her companion by the hand, and together they sped swiftly back up the slope. Fortunately the

three sailors had been unarmed, but their calls brought others with pistols, from a boat not far off, and as Rufus turned to run they were almost upon him. He saw in a moment that he had only one chance. At the back of the beach was a bank, not high, but quite steep, and the path up its face led between two huge boulders. As the sailors dashed toward him Rufus sprang up the path, crouched behind one of the rocks, and seized a large stone he found there. The head of the first of his pursuers appeared above the bank. Rufus knew the evil face ; he had last seen it bending over Carver Jennicom's bleeding body. The thought added strength to Rufus' arms as he swung them up over his head.

"Pybus Foulfoot," he gasped. "Wert not drowned then!" and hurled the stone with all his might. It struck the villain full in the chest, and he sank back with a groan. Another followed him close, but this time the lad's pistol was ready. As he fired he sprang up and ran. He counted upon throwing his foes into confusion for a few moments at least, and in this he succeeded. The men hesitated before making another rush, and when they finally

gained the top of the bank Rufus and the girls were out of sight.

"No use, lads," said the leader. "Ma foi! but the young rascal has foiled us neatly. Back to the boat." Without doubt the voice belonged to Dollier Le Casson.

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH RUFUS MAKES A FRESH START

Rufus ran on up the rough path, fearing at any moment to hear his pursuers at his heels. If they caught him again they could dispose of him easily, as he had not even had time to reload his weapon. He could easily have hidden in one of the dark clumps of bushes near at hand, but the thought did not occur to him,—so determined was he to remain on the path between Le Casson and Annis until he knew that the English maid was safe.

At last he realized, with relief, that he was nearing the road. He quickened his pace, and as he swept round a turn of the path he ran into the arms of a young man.

"Thank heaven!" cried the other. "They have not hurt you!"

Rufus stood breathless and amazed. "Humfrey Brewster," he panted, "how came you here?"

"Why, I ran on ahead of the others," cried

Humfrey. "Mistress Annis told us of your danger. 'Twas like you, Rufus!"

"Then she is safe?"

"Aye, Sir Lanslott and Mr. Gardiner and the others are coming. So you escaped the villains after all!"

"Yes," said Rufus. "I think they have given up the chase. It was good of you to come to help me. I have had hard thoughts of you, Humfrey. Forgive me!"

"Aye, Rufus." The two lads clasped hands, and the quarrel that had marred their friendship was healed forever. In a few moments the party led by Sir Lanslott came up to them, and the nobleman fairly overwhelmed Rufus with his gratitude. "This is the second debt you have laid me under, Master Jennicom," he said, "and it is a heavy one. Be assured I shall not forget it. And now tell us what happened. Annis and her maid have been too agitated to tell their story."

So Rufus told of the struggle, and of what he had overheard at the Admiral Blake, and finally he handed Sir Lanslott the letter he had found, pointing out that it was undoubtedly written by Laplash.

"Vaylmer Laplash!" exclaimed the nobleman, "why, this makes it clear as daylight. It is but another of that young rake's escapades. His estate joins mine in Hampshire, and he made love to my daughter, though she would have none of him, and his father and I were opposed to the match. He went off to London in a temper and killed a man there in a duel, so that he was forced to flee the country. Unhappy young man: I am sorry for him."

Both Sir Lanslott and Mr. Gardiner insisted that Rufus should accompany them back to Pinewood. "Nay, Annis will not take it kindly if you do not give her the opportunity to thank you in person," urged Sir Lanslott, and Rufus finally yielded, though he feared it was not wise to place himself once more in the power of the magistrates.

The welcome that Rufus received from Mistress Annis warmed him through and through, and made him feel that it was good to be again among friends. That night he and Humfrey slept together, but before they closed their eyes there was much they had to say to each other—of the wanderings of Rufus in the

forest, of Carver Jennicom's recovery from his wound, and of the war against the Pequots. Rufus listened eagerly with a hopeful and contented heart. The news of his father's restored health was happiness enough for the present, and as for the shadow of the trial that awaited him if he returned to Boston, he was quite ready to believe—and with good reason—that Sir Lanslott's influence and Mr. Gardiner's would be exerted to save him from the penalty of the law.

"Humfrey, I've made a sad mess of it all," he admitted, "but what I've gone through since the night I cut the Governor's standard has taught me a lesson."

"You're too impulsive, that's just the trouble," Humfrey replied, "and if you're not careful you'll find yourself in a fresh scrape one of these days—you will get out of this one all right, take my word for it."

"I hope I shall," said Rufus, "and if I do —well, you'll see. But there is one thing you haven't told me yet," he added. "How does it happen that you are here instead of lying in Boston jail?"

"Well," laughed Humfrey, "as for being

here, I came with a message from Captain Underhill to Mr. Gardiner. And as to the matter of the jail, why, that was Governor Vane's doing. A few days after your escape —I was blamed, of course, for not giving the alarm—Elias Blades and the warrant-officer took me back to Boston. I was put in my father's charge for a time, and then one evening came the Governor to speak with me. 'You're a most troublesome fellow, Master Brewster,' said he, very grave and stern, 'and I hear you've been setting the laws of Massachusetts at defiance. I've been vexing myself for the last week to know what to do with you. It seems a pity to clap you in jail.' 'If you please, sir,' I spoke up—'twas the day after we'd had the news of John Oldham's murder—'If you please, sir, give me a firelock and send me to fight the Pequots.' 'Why! there's a way out of the difficulty,' he cried. 'Go you shall, and look to it I have good report of you.' That was all. The Governor spoke for me, and I was enrolled on the force. 'Tis a fine trade, soldiering, and I intend to stick to it."

"I shall follow it myself, if they'll let me,"

vowed Rufus. "Tell me, is there any word of Roger Williams?"

"He still abides and preaches at Salem," Humfrey replied, "and as fearless as ever, breeding discord and dissension. His influence grows, and 'tis whispered that the magistrates will shortly bring him to trial before the General Court. As for my father, he's been an altered man since this trouble, and is thinking seriously of moving to the Connecticut River settlements. He is in some disfavor at Boston, even with Governor Vane. But he has other reasons as well for the step. Several of his friends have emigrated to Hartford and Windsor, and my mother's uncle—you'll remember Caleb Stagg—has sold his homestead and is going with his two sons to Wethersfield next spring. Governor Winthrop is a liberal-minded man, and the laws are not enforced so strictly in the Connecticut Valley."

"'Tis a wonder, then, that any people are left in the Bay towns," said Rufus, with a yawn.

On the following day the two lads went with Sir Lanslott and Mr. Gardiner to Bos-

ton. The town was all astir with talk of the Pequot uprising and the preparations to meet it. Sir Lanslott could not at once get a hearing for his young friend and Rufus, having at once given himself up upon his arrival, spent a number of anxious days in the jail. And not the least of his troubles was the fact that while he lay there inactive Humfrey was off with the force that Captain Underhill led to Block Island to strike the first blow at the savages.

But a brighter day dawned at last. On the very afternoon that Boston was rejoicing over the return of the Underhill expedition, which had been quite successful, Sir Lanslott Charmion succeeded at length in getting the ear of some important persons in the town. That evening Rufus was quietly escorted to the residence of the chief magistrate, where he found Sir Lanslott with the young Governor. With tears in his eyes the nobleman had told the Governor what the boy had done, and of his own obligation to him.

"'Tis such a debt as I can never hope to discharge," he continued to Rufus, "though I've made a beginning by asking Mr. Vane to

grant you a full pardon, to which he graciously assents. But I wish to do much more. I'm assured by Master Nathaniel Brewster that you write a clerkly hand, and that you've benefited by his scholarly teachings——"

"Don't spoil him," broke in Governor Vane, half in jest. "Slife! he's clearly meant for a soldier."

"And that is what I would be, sir, above all things," Rufus boldly declared.

"So you shall, so you shall," vowed Sir Lanslott. "Ay, a soldier of the King. I'll see to it. Directly you come back to Boston —you'll want to go home to visit your father for a time—I'll find occupation for you as my secretary. And when I return to England—which may not be until the spring—I'll take you with me and charge myself with the career that you've decided to follow. And 'tis a commendable choice, my lad. His Majesty's commission is as good as signed and in your pocket, I promise you. Nay, don't try to thank me—the gratitude is on my side. Do I understand that you accept the offer?"

"Hast nothing to say, Master Jennicom?" cried the Governor.

Dazzled by the radiant vista that had opened before him, by the unlooked-for munificence of his noble patron and the assurance that his wildest dreams were to be realized, Rufus was at first struck speechless.

"I should be an ungrateful churl to think of it," exclaimed the lad at last. "I've no fitting words, sir—your kindness chokes me. But—but I'll prove myself worthy."

"I'm sure of that," said Sir Lanslott. "The matter is settled, then. And if you serve Charles Stuart as gallantly and unselfishly as you've served my daughter, why, there's no telling how high you may rise."

News, good or bad, travels quickly, and the full account of his stirring adventures preceded Rufus to Plymouth, where with two exceptions—Jeremy Quills and Seth Dymett held sullenly aloof—his neighbors had only praise and amiable feeling for him. Carver Jennicom gave his son an affectionate, fatherly welcome, and made no allusion whatever to the past, which he had resolved to put from his thoughts as far as was possible.

"My son, have you chosen wisely in accepting this offer?" he asked. "Reflect. Search your heart well. It is not too late——"

"My word is given," Rufus broke in. "'Tis the chance of a lifetime, and I'll not refuse it. A soldier I'm determined to be, one way or another. Father, you will surely not deny your consent?"

"And if I did?"

"I should go back to Boston jail. Governor Vane's pardon was conditional—it was granted with the understanding that Sir Lanslott was to have the shaping of my future."

"So much I gather from the letters of Sir Lanslott and the Governor," assented Jennicom, with a sigh. "Nay, I'll not refuse. Do as you wish. But promise me one thing, that you will return here before you sail for England. I shall have something of importance to say to you then."

Rufus willingly made the promise, and the subject was not again referred to. Time passed all too swiftly for Carver Jennicom, and too slowly for the lad, who, at the expi-

ration of five weeks, bade farewell to his Plymouth friends and journeyed to Boston in the pleasant autumn weather. At once he entered upon his new duties, which took him each morning to the Governor's house. He lodged with Nathaniel Brewster, and as his afternoons and evenings were his own, he spent them with Humfrey and Rose. Annis was occasionally in their company, for she had taken an impulsive fancy to the little Puritan maid, and the two were fast friends.

Though on the whole the Pequots refrained from active hostilities, several stragglers of the Connecticut settlements were murdered during the early weeks of that autumn of 1636. This had no effect on Nathaniel Brewster, and he went steadily forward with his plans for emigrating in the spring. But Sir Lanslott Charmion had the welfare of the colonies deeply at heart, and moreover, having been a soldier at one time, he welcomed the prospect of bearing arms again in defense of England's territory; so, believing that an Indian war was not far distant, he decided to prolong his stay until the following year, and gave sound reasons for the same in a lengthy communica-

tion which he despatched to his royal master. For the present he took no steps—and it is doubtful if any were possible—toward bringing Vaylmer Laplash and his companions to justice; nor had he any knowledge concerning them, save the fact that they had made their way to New Amsterdam.

On the 3d of September occurred an event of general interest to both of the coast colonies, and to the inland settlements as well. For on that date—Rufus was at Plymouth at the time—Roger Williams was tried before the General Court at Boston, and was ordered to leave the country within six weeks. But a little later, through the influence of the few faithful friends who clung to him, the execution of the decree of banishment was postponed until the spring.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN WHICH CAPTAIN UNDERHILL RECEIVES WRITTEN ORDERS AND RUFUS LEARNS A SECRET

After a spell of mild and thawing weather, with alternate bursts of sunshine and hard downpours of rain, the wind had suddenly shifted to another quarter and brought in its train a frost of great severity. A flurry of snow had fallen that morning, to lie in a film of glittering whiteness, and there was promise of more to follow in the low, massed clouds that reflected their leaden hue on the moaning waters of the harbor.

Rufus Jennicom sat busily writing while the short December afternoon crept by. He was engaged on a special task, having some documents to transcribe for Sir Lanslott, who wished to despatch the copies by a vessel that was to sail for London on the morrow. Hedged about from intrusion, the young secretary worked with zeal and haste, hoping

to finish before darkness should set in. He was bent forward in a high-backed chair, and his paper and quills, inkhorn and pounce-box, were spread on the deep window-seat, which made an admirable desk. Behind him rose a tall screen of tapestry portraying the chase of the boar, and to the left a wood-fire blazed on the open hearth, and flashed coy, rosy glances at the oak paneling of the room, and the grim figure in armor, and the buckler and broadsword that hung above it.

An echo of girlish voices reached Rufus now and then. Sir Lanslott and his daughter were staying at the Governor's house, and Rose Brewster was spending the day with Annis. From time to time, to ease his wearied eyes, Rufus lifted them to the lattice window. Through the panes he saw the gaunt and leafless trees nodding in the wind; the royal standard swaying idly over the gateway; the vista of trim garden-paths and naked shrubbery, with brown rose-bushes shivering on one side, and on the other rows of cabbage-stalks poking their frost-bitten heads above the powdery patches of snow.

A servant presently brought candles, but

there was no need to light them. As the shades of evening began to fall the lad's hand traveled more rapidly and the quill went oftener to the ink-pot. He could still see to write the final words, and then, his monotonous task completed, he leaned comfortably back in the chair and closed his twitching eyelids. He knew nothing more until a ripple of laughter called him to his senses, and brought him upright with a jerk. The logs had burned low, and the soft, red glow of the embers revealed the two girls standing over him.

"I fear I've been asleep," he exclaimed confusedly. "'Twas the heat of the fire."

"I am sorry we wakened you," Annis said demurely. "My father sent me to fetch the papers, if you have finished."

"They are quite ready," he replied, and handed the sheaf of documents to Annis, who tripped out of the room with them.

Rose perched herself in the corner of the window-seat, and Rufus, rising to his feet, stood near her. For a moment they gazed silently into the garden, where now the night had fallen darkly.

"You are tired," said the girl. "Have you worked very hard?"

"Well, it makes one's back ache," Rufus admitted. "I mustn't complain, though, for I'm going through what Governor Vane calls my term of probation. But I wouldn't stick to it all my life—no, not for the wealth of El Dorado. Ah, Rose, think of it! To go to England, and wear the King's uniform, and swagger about among the rare sights of London!"

"You could be just as good a soldier here, Rufus."

"Nay, you're wrong," he exclaimed scornfully. "What chance would I have in the colonies, as compared with England? I'm to start with an officer's commission—Sir Lanslott promises that—and I shall choose the cavalry and ride a spirited horse. But it won't be all play. War may break out in foreign parts, and then I'll be sent to the Continent, and will charge the enemy at the head of a troop ——"

"I wish you were not going. You will forget your old friends when you are over the sea."

"Forget them? Never that. You'll see, Rose. I shall come back some day with a fierce mustache, and a few scars won in battle."

"If you dare to have a great, ugly mustache ——" Rose interrupted.

They both laughed, and with that they heard crunching footsteps on the gravel outside. As quickly the house-door was thrown open, and the next instant Governor Vane and a companion entered the room, the former bearing a lighted candle that he had taken from a bench in the hall.

"I hardly looked for you so soon," the Governor was saying. "But I am glad you are prompt, for the minutes are precious. You got my message, Captain Underhill?"

"Ay, sir," was the reply, "and deeming it urgent I came with all speed."

"You did well. I have secret and important instructions for you."

Without a glance toward the window, else they must have discovered the two shadowy figures standing there, the speakers passed on to an adjoining apartment, in which Governor Vane was wont to transact business of

state. Leaving the door halfway open, he sat down to his desk and began to write.

"Come, let us go quietly," urged Rose.

"They will see us if we do," whispered Rufus, who was peeping over the top of the screen. "The light shines clear to the hall, and Captain Underhill is facing that way."

As he spoke, murmuring the words at the girl's ear, the Governor's voice rose distinctly and gave them a start.

"There is an end of forbearance at last," said he. "The matter in hand concerns Roger Williams."

"I judged as much, sir," said Captain Underhill.

"And you are to seize his person this very night," added the Governor, and went on with his writing.

Rufus drew a sharp breath, and he and Rose looked guiltily at each other in the dusky glow of the firelight. It was purely through mischance and thoughtlessness that they had come to play the part of eavesdroppers, but now, after what they had already learned, they dared not risk almost

certain discovery, and charges which they could not easily refute, by attempting a tardy flight. Nor was the lad, at least, in any haste to be gone.

"Hush!" he whispered. "Be as still as a mouse."

For nearly a minute the scratching of the quill in the next room, as it ran from line to line, was the only sound to be heard by the two behind the screen.

"I've just presided at a special session of the court," said Governor Vane, "and in view of the growing popularity and influence of Roger Williams, and the steps he is taking to found a new settlement in or close to his Majesty's dominions of New England—we have fresh information on that point—the magistrates have annulled the former order against him and voted for extreme measures." He sprinkled sand on the writing and folded the paper twice. "Here is your authority, duly signed," he continued. "You will proceed straightway to Salem, arrest Williams and fetch him to Boston, and without delay put him on board the Virginia Merchant, by which he will be conveyed to England. The

vessel lies ready in the harbor, and sails to-morrow."

"'Tis short enough notice," replied Captain Underhill. "How am I to get to Salem?"

"As you think best."

"Then I'll borrow Gurtred Toothaker's sloop and travel by water. The moon will be up by and by, and what wind there is blows from the right quarter."

"I meant to suggest something of the sort," said the Governor. "Be sure to take a couple of deputies with you, but on no account divulge a word of your plans, even to them, until you have put to sea. Williams has numerous friends in Boston, and there's reason to believe that he is prepared to take to flight at a moment's warning."

"I might go on horseback, sir."

"No, the sloop will be better. How soon can you start?"

"Within two hours at most."

"That will do. I rely on your discretion and zeal, Captain Underhill."

"There will be no hitch, sir. But I could wish that I was bound on a more pleasant

errand. I'm sorry for this misguided young minister."

"Not more sorry than I am," Governor Vane declared earnestly. "Indeed, 'tis a thousand pities, and yet greater leniency was never shown to any man. He has brought his fate on himself."

"His fate? Then he is to be tried ——"

"Ay, in London. And so surely as spring follows winter he will be condemned and executed. I know the temper of those who will judge him, and I know also that Archbishop Laud ——"

His voice suddenly became inaudible, and the streak of yellow light vanished; for Captain Underhill, at a hasty sign from the Governor, had closed the door of the inner apartment.

"Now is our chance," whispered Rufus. "Come!"

They glided swiftly and noiselessly to the hall, where candles were burning, and thence to an empty room on the opposite side.

"How cruel men are!" Rose said distressfully. "They are going to arrest poor Roger Williams and send him to England. Do

you really believe that he will be put to death?"

"He won't if I can prevent it," vowed the lad.

"Rufus! what will you do?"

He did not answer at once. His thoughts were back in the past, far in the forest, and in spirit he was living over again the events of that black and stormy night when a musket-shot, fired in the very nick of time, had rescued Humfrey and himself from the clutches of the pursuing panther. The girl repeated her question.

"Don't ask me what I think of doing," the lad replied hoarsely. "'Tis best that you should know nothing. But this I will remind you of, Rose. Roger Williams saved my life and your brother's, at the risk of his own. Can I do less for him?"

"Oh! I think I understand. But the danger! And your prospects, Rufus?"

"I trust I shan't be found out, and I won't be if all goes well. Hush! Annis is coming."

They quickly entered the hall, and a moment afterward Sir Lanslott and his daughter descended the staircase.

CHAPTER XIX

IN WHICH RUFUS RIDES TO HIS FATE

It was now between six and seven o'clock, and when Rufus and Rose set off for home a few minutes later, the Governor and Captain Underhill were still in private consultation and had just sent word to Sir Lanslott to join them. The walk through the frosty night was a brief and silent one.

"If I'm not down at the usual time to-morrow you must call me," said Rufus, as they reached the gate; and the girl understood him perfectly.

There were two circumstances, as it fortunately happened, which immensely favored his designs. He was to sleep alone that night, for the same morning Caleb Stagg's son Reuben had arrived in Boston on an errand for his father, and after dinner he and Humfrey had started off to visit a boy friend of the latter's at Charlestown. They had gone on foot and by boat, and consequently Reuben

Stagg's horse, a sturdy young animal, was at the present moment munching hay in the little stable.

It seemed to Rose and Rufus that the evening would never end. But at last the tall clock in the corner indicated a quarter to nine, and Nathaniel Brewster reached for his Bible, from which he read a chapter aloud and followed it with a short prayer. Rising from his knees he began to put back the half-charred logs from the fire-dogs.

"'Tis bedtime," he said. "Art tired, Rufus? You seem so."

"A little," replied the lad, whose nervousness had been growing more and more apparent. "I was writing hard all the afternoon."

The opportunity was welcome. Rufus yawned, picked up a lighted candle, and departed with a calm "good-night." Before leaving the room he glanced furtively at Rose, who lifted her eyes to his with a look in them that he was to recall many and many a time in the future. Then he ascended to his bed-chamber, and waited until he heard the family come up-stairs, when he extinguished his candle and opened the window.

"The sloop will have started by this time," the lad reflected. "But there's hardly enough breeze to fill the sail, unless 'tis stronger at sea. 'Twill be a slow cruise, and I shall easily outdistance them."

For a brief moment he faltered in his heroic purpose, shrank from the price that he might be called upon to pay, as he thought of his cherished hopes and ambitions, of the glorious career that his feet had begun to tread. As quickly the weakness passed, and he put the ignoble impulse from him. He owed his life to Roger Williams, who now was threatened by as deadly a peril. At any cost he must requite the debt of gratitude, warn and save the young minister.

"I can and will do it," he vowed. "Nobody will suspect that 'twas I. None will think to question me afterward. They need not even know that Roger Williams had warning."

He had long since formed his plans in minute detail. Though Salem was only fourteen miles to the northeast of Boston as a bird flies, he must make a considerable detour westward to avoid the wide lower reaches of

the Charles and Mystic Rivers. The inland parts of those streams, he felt sure, were tightly frozen, and he could cross on the ice. Twenty miles each way the journey would be, but he was sanguine of covering the round distance in six hours, and thus reaching home by four or five o'clock in the morning, before his absence could be discovered. There was light to guide him, and he was not afraid of losing his bearings. The hard, wind-swept ground would leave no telltale tracks. As for the horse, it was not to be ridden on the morrow, and a vigorous rubbing down, directly he returned, would remove all outward traces of fatigue and recent usage.

It wanted a quarter to ten, or thereabouts, when Rufus judged that it was safe to start. The house was dark and silent as, with steady nerves, he slipped from the room in his stocking feet and noiselessly groped his way down the stairs. Here he put on his shoes, donned cloak and hat and thick gloves, and a moment later was standing in the garden with the door quietly shut upon him.

Fortunately the stable was at the end of a long enclosure that stretched back of the

house, which itself was on the southern outskirts of the town. Near by was a gate set in the palisade, and having opened this the lad saddled and bridled the horse and led it from the stall.

"Softly, softly, Firefly," he whispered.

The intelligent animal seemed to understand the need of caution, and with little or no noise it walked daintily out of the paddock, into the grassy lane.

Not a sound was to be heard, not a ray of light to be seen. All Boston was apparently wrapped in slumber. Rufus closed the gate and set off on foot, carefully leading the horse, and avoiding the occasional spots where little patches of snow lay in white furrows.

It was a most formidable task that Rufus had set himself—how formidable he did not realize at the beginning—and it must have proved an impossible one but for several things that were in his favor. The night was not dark, and he had a powerful and willing horse. Moreover he had been twice to Salem, and from personal knowledge and hearsay he was familiar with the lay of the country between that little town and Boston. Even

with these telling advantages, however, he fell widely short of his calculations; for when he finally reached the bridle-path leading straight to his destination, after he had crossed the Charles and the Mystic, traversed the lonely and rugged woodlands that stretched eastward from the latter river, the time must have been all of one o'clock in the morning. So much he judged, but the fact did not daunt him, nor did he see any reason to despair of accomplishing the return journey within safe limits.

"The worst is over; it will be easy going now," he told himself hopefully. "A beaten road is vastly different from what I've come through. I ought to get to Salem by another hour—'tis well under twelve miles—and if I start back at once I should be home by six o'clock or earlier."

At a dangerous gallop, with loose reins, he dashed along the narrow, winding trail. It seemed to fly up to meet him, whirled past with a thud of hoof-beats striking like iron on frozen moss and sward. Out of the deep gloom on both sides misshapen boulders loomed and vanished. Leafless trees reached

shivering arms toward him as he bent low in the saddle, and evergreen foliage sought to drag him off. Yet a third river intervened—he touched it where was a fording-place in summer—and the rough ice snapped and grumbled as he pounded over it.

"Faster! faster!" Rufus urged the faithful steed. "We must save him, Firefly. We must."

Twice, drawing near to an isolated settlement, the lad lost time by making a detour through the timber. Then back to the trail again, and on and on, at a furious pace, while mile after mile of ghostly forest reeled behind. Mocking voices—he could scarcely persuade himself that it was a delusion—dinned and bellowed at his ears. Real enough was the howling of wolves at a distance, and presently befell a more dreaded peril close at hand, when some wild beast gave hot chase from the rear, first making its presence known by a blood-curdling scream.

The horse, snorting and plunging with terror, tore at a mad, unrestrained gallop. But of a sudden the creature's cries ceased; it had evidently given up the chase. Directly

ahead a gray, arched patch of light was visible, and a minute later Rufus was within sight of Salem.

The trail approached the town from the westward, and ended on the brink of a frozen stream. Here the lad stiffly dismounted, his throbbing heart filled with gratitude, and having tied the perspiring horse to a sapling and spread a blanket over him, he hurried across the ice. Two hundred yards brought him to the young minister's house, which was on the verge of the settlement, and partly enclosed by pine-trees. Reassured by the silence he cast a pebble against an upper window, and it was quickly thrown open.

"Who's below?" demanded a familiar voice.

"'Tis Rufus Jennicom," the lad replied. "I've come from Boston to tell you ——"

"I will be down directly," was the hasty interruption.

The window slid shut, and within five minutes Roger Williams was at the door, already dressed, to listen to the story that Rufus told him in a few short sentences.

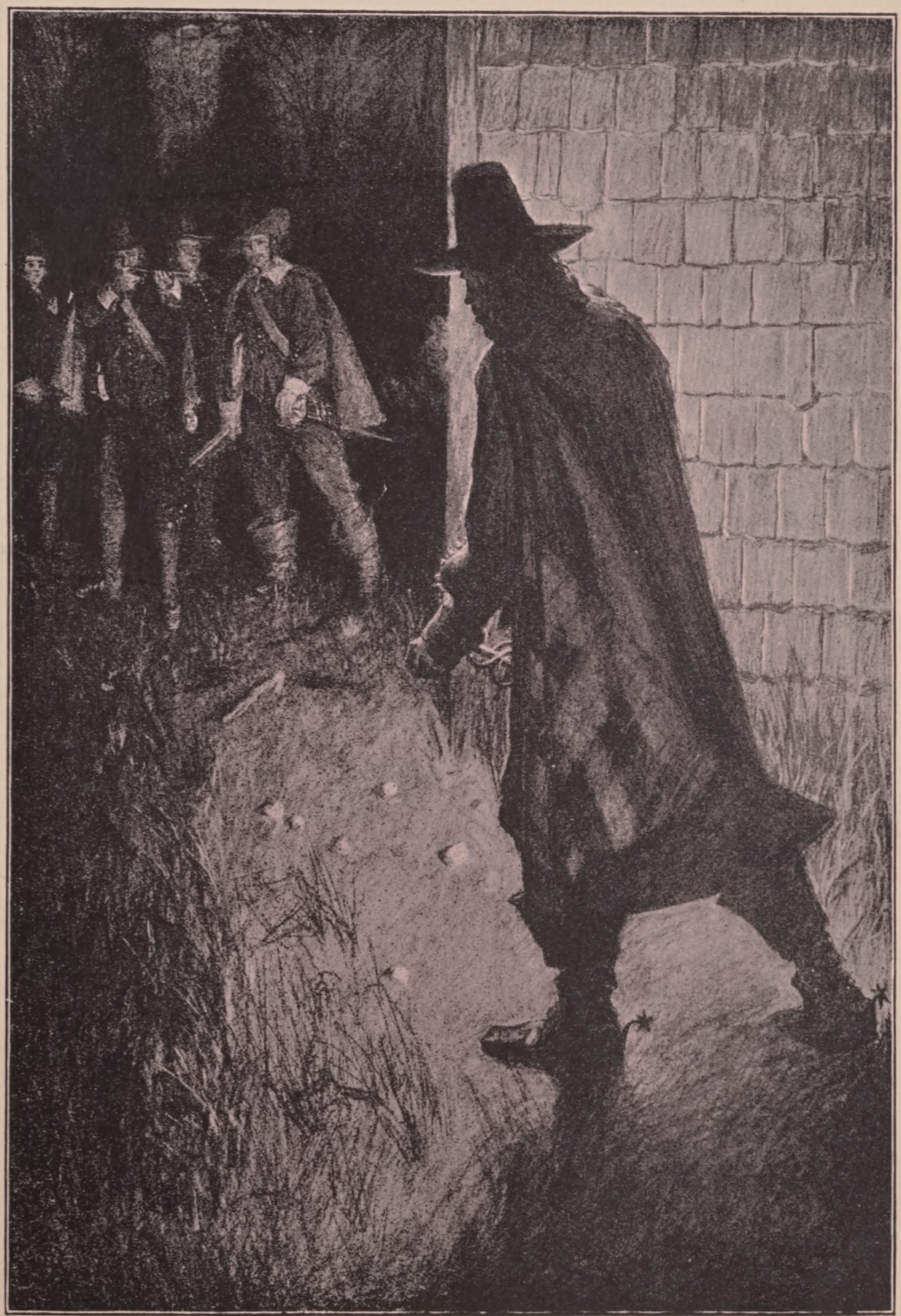
"My enemies are very determined and

merciless," he said. "God forgive them!—they know not what they do. My brave lad, I've no words to thank you. Do not wait, but be off at once, lest you suffer heavily for my sake. I shall seek refuge in the forest, for though my endurance is strong and my patience great, I would resist to the death rather than be put on shipboard and sent to England. I had intended to take to flight on the morrow—an intimation reached me several days ago—and at the present moment I have three trusty comrades in the house, who have chosen to share my exile. May heaven bless and keep you! I did not expect the blow to fall so soon, and by your timely warning ——"

He was interrupted by the friends referred to, whom he had previously roused from sleep. They carried firelocks and wore cloaks and hats, and when the situation had been briefly explained to them they were for immediate departure.

"If the sloop left Boston at nine o'clock," said one, "it should have arrived by now."

"It can't be far off," declared another, "and who knows but Captain Underhill and his



HE FLASHED A LIGHT IN THE FACES OF THE GROUP

deputies are already in the town and close upon us?"

"'Tis likely they are," assented the minister. "'Twill be wise to set forth at once. Master Jennicom, tarry no longer, I pray you. May we meet in happier days, and till then I'll bear the debt in mind."

With that he hastened into the house to bid farewell to his wife and children, and the next moment, when Rufus was on the point of starting, there was a sound of stealthy footsteps among the pine-trees, and as quickly a man's form darted into view at a distance of a couple of yards. Whipping a lanthorn from beneath his cloak he flashed a light on the faces of the startled little group, and at the same time the yellow rays revealed his own identity—outlined the sour, forbidding features of Elias Blades.

"Ha! it seems I've come none too soon," he exclaimed. "Why, rot me if there ain't young Jennicom! Didst fly hither on wings, boy? In the King's name I charge you all to submit——"

"Silence," commanded one of the minister's friends, in a low voice, as he leveled his

musket at the Boston constable's head. "Make no outcry, and stir not, else assuredly you will never serve warrant again."

It was no empty threat, and Elias Blades prudently heeded it, holding the lanthorn in a trembling hand. The next instant appeared Roger Williams, his countenance gray with the bitterness of parting from his loved ones.

"Art recognized, lad?" he whispered, grasping the situation at a glance.

"Ay, he called me by name."

"Then you must come with us. I'm grieved beyond words, but you've no choice unless you wish to return to Boston and face the penalty of your heroism."

"I'll not do that," Rufus vowed hoarsely.

His decision was perforce immediate, as swift as the fell and unexpected stroke that had crumbled his hopes and vanities to ashes. With heart-breaking despair, in unspeakable anguish of spirit, he took to flight with the minister and his devoted companions. Almost at once the little band of five reached the verge of the limitless forest and plunged into its welcome gloom, while behind them, growing ever fainter and fainter, rang the

lusty bawling of Master Blades and the answering shouts of Captain Underhill and the rest of his men, who were approaching with all speed from the direction of the harbor.

CHAPTER XX

IN WHICH GOVERNOR VANE RECEIVES TIDINGS FROM THE WILDERNESS

One cold and stormy night in the early part of the new year Mr. Harry Vane was engaged with a visitor in the paneled room to which the reader has already been introduced. In snug contrast to the inclement conditions without were the warmth and glow of the fire that roared high in the chimney-place, the thick draperies of the windows, and the pair of flaming candles that stood on the large, flat-topped desk. It had been a busy and trying day for the energetic young Governor, and a mass of untouched work was still heaped before him. He must finish ere he slept, yet for the moment he had brushed the task lightly from his mind, and was all-absorbed in a lengthy communication indited in the neat and scholarly penmanship of his colleague of New Plymouth.

The visitor sat stiffly on the edge of his

chair, his eyes bent gloomily to the floor, and his hands fidgeting with his steeple-crowned hat. There was unbroken silence in the room until the Governor, putting down the closely-written sheets, looked thoughtfully across the desk at his companion.

"Master Jennicom," said the younger man, "I perceive that you have, and no doubt deservedly, the sympathy and best wishes of Governor Bradford. You have mine as well, be assured. But more than that I cannot offer you, though you are most heartily commended to my good offices. In the first place I've had not a word, not a rumor, concerning your son since he fled with Roger Williams six weeks ago. And in the second place, to grant him another pardon would be a gross and impossible misuse of my prerogative. Indeed, 'tis not to be thought of for an instant; nor does Mr. Bradford urge it in his letter."

"I—I hoped that Rufus might be allowed to return to my roof, where I would be responsible for him," Carver Jennicom replied sadly. "Yet I had no right to expect such a boon. His heart is not at fault ——"

"Nay, 'tis his hasty judgment, which leaps before discretion," the Governor interrupted. "'Twas from a sense of gratitude, I believe, that he threw away a career any man in these colonies might have envied. The patronage of Sir Lanslott Charmion is not a thing to be despised."

"I did not approve of Rufus going to England, sir."

"'Twould have been the making of him. However, he's lost the chance, and there's an end of it. To put the matter plainly, Master Jennicom, your son has committed a mad and unlawful act, and you should be content to know that for the present he is beyond reach of the consequences of his crime. I'm not blind to the lad's sterling qualities. He may redeem himself."

"He is all I have, sir," said Jennicom. "Next to the welfare of the community, I've lived only for him. From his childhood I've spared neither admonition, precept, nor example."

"Whereby you've shown him but the gloomy and narrow side of a code of life that is none too cheerful at its best. Your Puritan

tenets, if I may pass an opinion, have a leaning toward despotism."

"I cannot agree with you, sir. But come what may, God's will be done. I must bow to his decree."

There was a pause in the conversation, and before it could be resumed Annis Charmion opened the door and glided into the room, evidently supposing that the Governor was alone. At the sight of Jennicom, who regarded this vision of worldly beauty with a cold and severe glance, the girl started back.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir," she exclaimed confusedly. "I did not know—I wanted to ask if you had any news of my father."

"None, my child," replied Mr. Vane, with a smile, "and indeed, 'tis too soon to look for any. 'Twill be good news when it comes."

"I hope it will. Thank you so much, and please forgive my indiscretion."

With a graceful curtsy Mistress Annis withdrew, and the Governor fumbled for a moment with his papers.

"That young lady," remarked Jennicom, "has helped to turn my boy's head with her airs and fripperies."

"Faith! she's turned mine as well, and little wonder," laughed the Governor. "Her father, as perhaps you are aware, left Boston ten days ago to confer with Mr. Winslow regarding the defenses of the Connecticut Valley settlements. Sir Lanslott is a keen soldier, and would see some fighting before he returns to England. For myself, I'm bound to hope he will be disappointed. Yet if war comes in the spring we must be prepared for it."

"I pray the danger may pass," replied Jennicom, as he rose from the chair. "I will bid you good-evening, sir," he added, "since you've shown me the hopelessness of further entreaty ——"

Just then the iron hammer that hung at the portal of the house gave two low, quick raps. The door was heard to open almost immediately, and the next instant appeared Mr. Vane's bond-servant, looking decidedly agitated and surprised.

"Some one desires to speak with you, sir," he announced.

"Who is it?" asked the Governor.

"He gave no name, sir. His business is important."

"But do you know him, Peter?"

The man nodded meaningly, stepped closer, and whispered several words at his master's ear. The Governor changed countenance and started visibly. He pondered with knitted brows.

"I will receive this person," he intimated. "Detain him for a half-minute, Peter. You can't well go now, Master Jennicom," he added, directly the servant had vanished. "I must beg that you will consent to put yourself in my hands for a brief time. Will you kindly withdraw yonder," indicating the private apartment adjoining, "and be careful not to betray your presence, no matter what you may see or hear. 'Tis a strange request, but I've sound reason for it."

"You need not fear, sir, that I shall pry into your affairs."

"Nay, you misunderstand me. I propose that you shall witness whatever takes place."

"Very good, sir."

A few seconds later the old man was hidden behind the partly-closed door, and none too soon. The mysterious visitor entered the outer room from the hall, and as he doffed

his hat and threw open the folds of his cloak, the candle-light revealed the features of Rufus Jennicom.

With head slightly bent in humility, a look of quiet confidence on his face, the lad stood between the fireplace and the desk, waiting for the other to speak. Governor Vane fixed him with a cold eye, and wore his most forbidding frown—which cost him an effort to assume and hold. He had already rehearsed in mind the part he intended to play, and hugely relished the situation, with its elements of a comedy.

"Sink me! but this almost exceeds belief," he exclaimed in a harsh voice. "You've the audacity to come back to Boston—to walk boldly into my very presence. Ha! I have it. You're tired of the privations of winter and the company of your fellow-rogues, and would barter your unlawful freedom for food and warmth."

"Nay, sir, you are wrong," broke in the lad. "I assure you ——"

"Not a word, sirrah," commanded the Governor, who was thinking the while if he might risk sending the young offender to Plymouth

on parole. "Pray be seated till I summon the constable to escort you round to the jail;" and he reached out his arm toward a bell-rope.

"Stop, sir," begged Rufus. "I've a letter for you. Will you read it first, and then, if you're in the same mind ——"

"A letter? From whom?"

"From Roger Williams. Here it is, sir."

The Governor took the packet of coarse, rough paper, and directly he had unfolded it and cast his eye down the contents—which appeared to have been scrawled with a pointed stick dipped in liquid red ochre—he began to see that his surmises had flown wide of the mark.

"Why! what's this?" he cried with a rising inflection. "The Pequots seeking to form an alliance with the Narragansetts—emissaries already on their way to the lodge of Canonicus—imminent danger of the two powerful tribes uniting against the Connecticut Valley settlements—offer of mediation if I see fit to authorize it. If I see fit. Why, good heavens, 'tis the only chance ——" The Governor flourished the letter in the lad's

face. "I suppose there's no doubt about the information?" he added hoarsely.

"None, sir," replied Rufus. "'Tis just as Roger Williams states. He is now in the Narragansett country."

"And he sent you from there?—you've traveled miles through the snow-bound wilderness to fetch the warning?"

"I volunteered to come, instead of the Indian whom he would have despatched alone."

"Knowing that you might be clapped in jail?"

"I had no fear of that, sir, under the circumstances. I knew that you would let me depart in safety."

"And you were quite right, my brave lad," exclaimed the Governor, proffering his hand to Rufus. "In the name of the New England colonies I thank you for your services, nor personally shall I forget what you've done. As for Roger Williams, his generous nature is a rebuke to his enemies. If any man can save the situation," he continued, as he paced the floor, "'tis this young minister of Salem. He lived for months among the

Narragansetts. Upon my word, I'm half inclined to believe that they will listen to him rather than to the Pequot envoys. When do you start back?"

"At once, sir. Every minute is precious. I'm instructed to return with all speed."

"And so you shall. I'll not detain you long."

Sitting down to his desk the Governor hurriedly wrote a few lines, which he folded and sealed.

"For Roger Williams," he said, handing the letter to Rufus. "And urge him further, on my behalf, to use his best efforts to avert the threatened calamity. Also bid him let me know the result as soon as possible. I shall confer with the magistrates to-morrow, but I suppose 'tis out of the question to reach Williams by messenger."

"I don't know where you would find him, sir."

"Nor would you tell me if you did. I understand that. Do you journey back alone?"

"I have one companion, who is waiting at the edge of the town. With your leave I will be off now."

"Stay! Is there anything I can do for you and your fellow-fugitives? Surely you're in want, and suffering from the wintry weather."

"We need nothing, sir," Rufus told him. "But can you give me any news of my father?"

"He is quite well," replied the Governor, with an involuntary glance over his shoulder.

"And how does he bear the blow?"

"It has hit him hard, my boy."

"I'm sorry for that," said Rufus. "If ever you should see him will you ask him to forgive me. And tell him ——"

A lump rose to his throat, and he turned to the door. The Governor followed, and went as far as the gate at the end of the garden, where he parted from the lad with a few earnest and comforting words, and watched him vanish along the dark street. Then he returned to the house, and found Jennicom waiting in the outer room. The old man's eyes were dim, his rugged features strangely softened.

"You heard all?" inquired Mr. Vane.

"Ay, sir, every word. My heart yearned to take the boy to my arms."

"'Twas for the best that you should not see

him. Master Jennicom, there's no need to worry about your son. Let him work out his own salvation."

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH ROGER WILLIAMS TAKES HIS LIFE IN HIS HANDS AND RUFUS DEPARTS FROM NARRAGANSETT BAY

After weeks of aimless wandering through the forest in the dead of winter, succored alike by Wampanoags and Narragansetts, Roger Williams and his little band had chosen an abiding-place at the top of Narragansett Bay, between forty and fifty miles to the southwest of Boston and on the edge of the Plymouth grant. It was from here that Rufus and Shingascung—the faithful redskin had attached himself to the exiles—set forth on their warning mission to Mr. Vane, and hither they safely returned within three days of the lad's dramatic interview with the young Governor of Massachusetts.

The situation was urgent, time was short and precious. Scorning to hold resentment for the wrongs he had suffered at the hands of the New England authorities, counting not

the frightful risk, the persecuted minister at once undertook to make good his proposal and play the part of intercessor.

With Shingascung for sole companion, Roger Williams embarked in a canoe and paddled along the shores of the Sound to the village of Canonicus, the great Narragansett sachem. He found the Pequot envoys there before him, the blood of recently-murdered settlers of the Connecticut scarcely dried on their weapons, and so cunningly had they stated their case that already the Narragansetts were beginning to waver.

The arrival of Williams was most opportune, though at first the chances seemed all against him. For three days and three nights, surrounded by ferocious enemies who thirsted to sink their tomahawks in his brain, his life literally hung in the balance. But in the end he prevailed. Having patiently heard and pondered both sides, the Narragansetts declared in favor of the self-constituted champion of the English and gave a blunt refusal to the warriors of the wily Sassacus, who, baffled and outwitted, betook themselves off in sullen rage. So there was to be no

alliance of the two tribes against the settlements, and more than that, such was the potency of the young minister's tongue, Canonicus voluntarily told him how a successful war on the Pequots might best be waged and most quickly concluded.

As soon as he dared safely leave the village, Williams set forth alone by water, and rejoined his anxious friends at the head of Narragansett Bay. He slept continuously for twenty-four hours, and then awoke at noontide to find Shingascung in the camp. The trusty redskin was the bearer of news—gleaned at second-hand from the disappointed ambassadors—that called for prompt endeavor if a massacre was to be averted. It seemed that the Pequots, feeling assured of the alliance with their powerful neighbors, had previously made ready to strike a destructive blow. Bands of armed warriors, streaked with the black war-paint, were mustering in the wooded fastnesses adjoining the lower and middle reaches of the Connecticut River, and a large force was shortly to march upon the town of Wethersfield.

Again Roger Williams proved himself a

generous benefactor, and was as prompt to grapple with this fresh emergency as he had been to checkmate the Pequot envoys. By one of his friends he despatched a full report of all that had happened to Governor Vane, while another, accompanied by two Narragansetts, got through the danger zone to Hartford and warned Governor Winthrop of the intended raid. On similar purpose bent Rufus and Shingascung made their way to Saybrook at the mouth of the Connecticut, and subsequently returned together, though Williams had intimated to the lad, for the sake of his future, that he would be well-advised to stop at the settlement and bear a part in any fighting that might occur.

At an earlier date such an opportunity would have been eagerly welcomed by Rufus, but he now rejected it. For one thing he was loth to part from those whose lot he had elected to share in time of trial, and for another he did not quite know his own mind. Indeed, the hard and sacrificing existence he had led since the flight from Salem, the fortitude and patience displayed by his companions, and above all the heroic example and

unselfish teachings of Roger Williams, could not have failed to impress the lad deeply. So he willingly came back with Shingascung to the little colony on Narragansett Bay, where meanwhile others were arriving to swell its numbers—men of the same earnest convictions who sought wider liberty of conscience and action, greater scope for religious beliefs, than were to be enjoyed under the strict laws of Massachusetts.

Soon afterward Sassacus let slip his impatient levies, and the dreaded war-whoop echoed along the valley of the Connecticut. The red fiends descended swiftly, and tomahawk and scalping-knife drank of English blood, but owing to the preparations that had been made beforehand the blow fell far short of its object. A few isolated settlers, caught unawares, were barbarously murdered. The little fort at Saybrook, garrisoned by twenty men, gave a good account of itself and compelled the enemy to raise the siege. Wethersfield was attacked by a larger force and suffered severely. The situation had never been worse, and hope sank to a very low ebb. Just then, however, the Indians desisted from

active hostilities—excepting the forays of a few small bands who roved the valley—and though the lull could only be regarded as the precursor of a storm, it permitted Governor Winthrop and his people to plan measures of retribution, in which they had the promise of substantial aid from the authorities of Boston and Plymouth.

About this time—the winter was nearly at an end and the breath of early spring was over the land—a member of the Wampanoag tribe brought to Roger Williams a sealed communication which he had traveled many weary miles to deliver. It was from the Governor of Massachusetts, and in addition to warm expressions of gratitude and friendship, and certain other matters of a private nature, it contained a lengthy and important allusion to Rufus. When the messenger had departed —he left the same day—Williams promptly sought an opportunity of speaking to the lad.

"I shall be sorry to lose you," he began, as they strolled together toward the shore of the bay, "but your fortunes have taken a fresh turn, and 'tis most advisable that we should

part. Hereafter—I say it with regret—our paths in life will diverge again."

"Why must it be so?" Rufus exclaimed in surprise. "I've no wish to leave you."

"'Tis for your own good, my boy. You are called to higher things. As you know, I've just received a letter from Mr. Vane ——"

"And he has sent for me? I am to return to Boston?"

"Nay, not that—as yet. But it is the Governor's desire—he has already intimated as much to Mr. Winthrop—that you proceed to Hartford and report yourself to Captain Mason, who will enroll you in the force that is to take the field in the spring against the Pequots. And you're to go by way of Wethersfield, where you should find some old friends. A considerable party, including Nathaniel Brewster's family and Caleb Stagg and his sons, left Boston a week ago for the Connecticut settlements. They've chosen a bad time to emigrate, but as they are accompanied by an escort of soldiers they will probably reach their destinations in safety."

"What do you think I ought to do?" asked Rufus, after an interval of silence.

"I've expressed my opinion," replied Roger Williams. "There can be no question about it. 'Tis clear that the Governor has virtually granted you a pardon. He wishes to give you another chance—an opportunity of regaining what you've lost. And you must take it. 'Twould be folly to refuse."

"Ay, and ungrateful," assented Rufus. "'Tis more than I've dared to hope for. I shall go, then, since you urge me to it."

Though he spoke soberly and without enthusiasm, his flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes betrayed him, and showed how deeply his feelings were stirred.

"We will set forth to-morrow," said the minister. "Shingascung and I will bear you company to within a short distance of Wethersfield. I am heartily glad, my boy," he added, "that you are no longer under the ban of outlawry, and that you are not to pay a heavier price for the noble act that confounded my enemies and saved me from being transported to England in irons. And Mr. Vane's offer means more, perhaps, than you are aware of. If the Governor forgives you in his magisterial capacity, can Sir Lanslott Charmion

do less? His patronage and good-will may be yours again."

As he spoke Roger Williams scanned his companion wistfully and narrowly. He had dropped the last remarks with a purpose, for he took a more than fatherly interest in the high-spirited lad, and had long ago won his innermost confidence. But Rufus, whatever may have been in his mind, was not to be drawn. For a moment, with an absent expression, he watched the gulls skimming over the gray waters of the bay.

"The chance is gone," he said, "and 'tis not easy to realize that I once had it. And 'twould be foolish to expect that the future will undo all the past. Indeed, I do not believe it, good Master Williams."

"Yet 'tis not impossible. Suppose the offer were to be renewed?"

"Governor Vane's kindness is enough to think of at one time," Rufus answered evasively. "I shall try to deserve it."

By an early hour the following morning the three had begun their journey. Steadily and without fatigue the little group trod the wilderness in a northwesterly direction, and

about sunset of the second day, having met with no mishap or adventure, they reached a stream which a few miles farther down flowed into the Connecticut River nearly opposite to the town of Wethersfield. A canoe had been hid in the neighborhood by the messengers whom Williams had sent to Hartford earlier in the year. A short search brought it to light, and when Shingascung had assured his companions—after he returned from a prowl in the surrounding forest—that there were no Pequots in the vicinity, a small fire was kindled in a sandy spot at the base of a pile of rocks, which rose sheer to a flat ledge three or four yards above. On the remaining three sides bushes formed a thick screen, and straggled down to the water's edge.

The night fell darkly, and the wind dropped to a low, plaintive moan. The frugal supper having been prepared and eaten, Williams and the lad sat with their backs to the rock and their feet to the blazing pine-knots, while the Indian squatted near by, wakeful and alert, and stolidly blew clouds of smoke from his red-stone pipe.

"To-morrow we part," said the minister,

breaking an interval of thoughtful silence, "you for Wethersfield and Hartford, Shingascung and I for the backward trail. I shall often think of you, my boy, as I strive for the good of my little colony in the wilderness. My prayers will go up for you, and I shall hope to learn something of your career from time to time. Great possibilities are within your reach. See that you avail yourself of them wisely, and to the best advantage. As you know, my boy, I have dined at rich men's tables and enjoyed their friendship, have been tempted by offers of advancement. But I think I have chosen the better part. Here, in this marvelous new land, with its dawning possibilities and widening scope, one can lead the simple, God-fearing life—the life that brings its own reward in the end. Here, Rufus, amid the growth of what will be a great nation, lies the secret of happiness and contentment. England can offer nothing in comparison."

In such strain, with a hidden motive, Roger Williams continued to talk, and Rufus to listen attentively, until both were too drowsy to sit up any longer. As they

stretched themselves by the warmth of the fire, and closed their eyes, a dark form crept noiselessly back from the top of the rock shelf and disappeared in the forest.

CHAPTER XXII

IN WHICH OLD FRIENDS TURN UP, AND DIRK HOBBEMA TELLS THE NEWS

"At last, mon ami! After the hardships and perils of the frozen north, our lucky star has brought us once more to the haunts of men. Behold! yonder lies the pale of civilization, such as it is. Yet I, for one, am not in the mood to cavil at it."

"Nor I, Dollier. Sink me, 'tis the most welcome picture ever I clapped eyes upon, not excepting the smell of the Thames and the houses on London Bridge when one has been buried in Hampshire for a season. But what tidings await me here—that is the question," the speaker added in an undertone.

The time—we have harked back a little—was toward the close of a dull and blustery day that was like neither winter nor spring—a day when Governor Vane, in far distant Boston, had hardly as yet thought of the letter he meant to write and despatch to Roger

Williams at Narragansett Bay. Down the ebbing tide of the Great North River, in the gathering dusk of evening, drifted a squat and cumbersome craft flying a weather-beaten flag of the Albania Fur Company, and from her deck Vaylmer Laplash and Dollier Le Casson gazed eagerly across the gray waters to the low, dark mass, looming gradually near, that was the thriving port of New Amsterdam.

The night had fallen murkily, and a rising wind was fretting the harbor waves, before the Zuyder Zee dropped anchor off one of the half-moon forts and put Laplash and his friend ashore. With boyish ardor they scrambled out of the boat, and vastly pleased they were to find themselves treading the familiar streets of the quaint little Dutch town after an absence of close on six months. They had spent the long winter—and not altogether from choice—in the trackless wilderness to the north of Fort Orange, the remote outpost of the Netherlands fur trade. Of their former mercenaries and sailors, the reckless crew of the Due Return, some had found graves beneath the snow and ice, some had been paid

off the previous autumn and had gone their ways, and a few they still had with them, including the infamous Pybus Foulfoot. He now was dogging their heels like a cringing hound.

"And what is to be the first thing?" asked Le Casson, when they were well into the town.

"Money, my good Dollier—shining ducats and guilders," Vaylmer replied, as he slapped his empty pockets; "and a respectable change of attire, and to crown all a supper that won't taste of bilge-water and smoke. Faith! I hardly know which we're most in need of."

Another hundred yards brought them to the residence of Kiliaen van Rensselaer, the wealthy patroon and jeweler of New Amsterdam, whose guests they had been before they went north, and in whose care Laplash had left a large sum of money and various personal belongings. They found the merchant at home—he greeted them as if they had been spirits come back from the dead—and an hour later the two young swashbucklers sallied forth again, each clad in gay and fashionable raiment and provided with a fat purse of gold. They picked up Foulfoot, who had

waited outside the house, and then made their way to the Black Dog, an inn of some repute in the vicinity of the Water Gate, where the entry of the three caused a flutter of surprise and curiosity. The buzz of voices ceased, and Jan Maartens, the portly landlord, bent nearly double to the visitors, who, superciliously eyeing the company and nodding here and there to a familiar face, swaggered through to a cozy little parlor at the rear, in which they had idled away many a long-past evening, secure from unwelcome intrusion. Their host followed with a lamp, and closed the door.

"Ah, mynheers, it does my heart good to see you again," he exclaimed, in English. "They told me that you would never return —that you had gone far into the mountains of the north to kill moose and elk, and had perished there of starvation."

"Faith, and we came near to it, my worthy man," said Laplash. "For days and weeks, entombed in a cabin buried deep under drifted snow, we rubbed elbows with death. But"—he hesitated for an instant—"d'you happen to be holding a letter for me, Master Maartens?"

"Since early in January," was the reply. "'Twas left here by the skipper of a vessel that had just arrived from London port. You shall have it at once, mynheer;" and unlocking a cupboard built into the wall he took the letter from a shelf.

Before breaking the seal Laplash studied the crest with which it was stamped, then opened the sheet and held it to the light. He and Le Casson had drawn their chairs to one corner of the table, and Foulfoot was seated at the farther end. Having started a cheerful fire and laid a white cloth, Jan Maartens bustled in and out for a time, fetching the tempting dishes for the preparation of which his good vrouw was renowned.

"Mynheers, your supper is served," he announced at length. "'Tis the best I have to offer."

"We shall feast royally, be assured," said Le Casson. "Come, mon ami," he added, as the door closed on the landlord. "Let us fall to, if you're ready."

With a muttered exclamation Laplash crumpled the letter to a ball—he had finished reading it—and thrust it into his

pocket. He stared gloomily across the table, all animation gone from his handsome face.

"What's amiss?" inquired his friend. "Bad news?"

"Ay, and plenty of it," Vaylmer replied, in a low voice. "It could hardly be worse, though indeed 'tis no more than I expected. The tale of our little diversions has reached England, and been followed by an order from Boston for my apprehension—and yours as well—in the event of our returning there. The warrant is in the hands of Crown officers, and they've already been down to Hampshire. This from my father, in answer to the letter I wrote him last July. He is in a pretty rage, you will believe, and vows he'll never hear my name spoken, which, by-the-by, I'm urged to change forthwith. Sink me, Dollier, I'll be plain John Smith hereafter."

"The warning is something to be thankful for," said Le Casson. "Instead of sailing for England, as we intended, let us proceed to France. Pouf! the air of the Seine will blow away your melancholy."

"A breath of London town, and a day with dog and gun in the Hampshire woods, are

worth a year of your Paris," the other exclaimed petulantly. "But you can't understand. I tell you I'm homesick, Dollier—my heart longs for the old country as it never longed for anything before. And longs in vain. I'll never see England again."

"Parbleu! 'tis not so bad as that," declared Le Casson. "The storm will blow over."

"Nay, I've a presentiment ——" He broke off with a bitter laugh, and the supper passed in glum silence. But it was rarely that Vaylmer's careless nature gave up to depression, and after a time he became almost cheerful once more.

"What news have you for us?" he asked of the landlord, who was clearing the table. "We've been out of the world for months, and know nothing. How are affairs in New England?"

"One sits in yonder company who can tell you better than I," replied Jan Maartens. "He is a trader in a small way—a daring fellow who goes everywhere with his pack on his shoulders—and he has just arrived from the parts you mention. Will you speak with him, mynheers?"

"By all means," assented Le Casson.

"Ay, fetch him in," said Laplash.

There presently entered a leathery little man, with a lean and weather-hardened frame, who was introduced by the name of Dirk Hobbema. When he had been put at his ease, he spoke freely enough, though with a quiet modesty that pleased his hearers. He had recently been to Plymouth and Boston, Hartford and Wethersfield, and had left the latter place but five days ago, returning to New Amsterdam partly by water and partly by land. He told of the anxious winter, with its Indian outrages and attacks.

"Are you perchance acquainted with one Carver Jennicom, of Plymouth?" Laplash inquired, with feigned indifference, after various other questions had been put and answered. At this Pybus Foulfoot pricked up his ears, and glanced with furtive, greenish eyes at the Dutch trader, waiting for his reply.

"I saw the man a month ago, and had speech with him," said Dirk Hobbema. "I sold him a knife and a comb."

"And has his son returned, do you know?" pursued Laplash.

"Not so, mynheer, nor is the lad likely to be seen again in Plymouth. His doings are the talk of the Bay colonies. Since he mutilated the royal standard in Boston last year, and broke out of ——"

"That's an old story," Laplash interrupted, "and I've heard also of his subsequent pardon. What's his latest rashness?"

"It happened early in the winter, when the magistrates had ordered the arrest and transportation to England of a dissenting minister of Salem, who had given them a good deal of trouble. But young Jennicom warned the man—Williams was the name—and fled with him into the wilderness, where he still remains."

"Helas! what a fine thing to do," exclaimed Le Casson.

"'Twas simple madness," said Vaylmer, as if speaking to himself, "considering that ——" He turned a curious, half-questioning glance on Foulfoot, whose swift change of color was masked by the shadow in which he sat.

"There was much pity for the lad among the Plymouth folk," Dirk Hobbema went on. "It appears that he had a noble patron, the

King's deputy to New England, who was to have taken him over-sea and made his fortune. However, that would probably have come to naught in any event, for Sir Lanslott Charmion lies now at death's door."

"What do you mean, my good fellow?" cried Vaylmer.

"Well, mynheer, I mean that when I left Wethersfield five days back the gentleman I've named was dangerously ill of a musket wound, which he received during the fight with the Indians. Fever had set in, and there was no doctor to be had."

"Sir Lanslott ill, perhaps dying!" Vaylmer exclaimed in a tone of honest distress. "Why, this is sad news. He was always most gracious to me, in spite of our differences, and I've but illy-repaid his kindness. Is his daughter with him?"

"Nay, she is in Boston. The journey to her father's side is too perilous for the maid to undertake."

"And what errand had Sir Lanslott at Wethersfield?"

"He is an old soldier, mynheer," the trader replied, "and I was told that he came to the

Connecticut Valley to consult with Governor Winthrop and to help in the defense of the settlements."

"Sink me," exclaimed Laplash. "I've an idea, Dollier. The English doctor—Ralph Gascoyne! He is still in New Amsterdam, for I caught a glimpse of him this evening. I'll pay him well, and send him to Wethersfield with all speed."

"There is a better way yet," said Le Casson.

"Medical skill was urgently needed, mynheer," Dirk Hobbema broke in before Vaylmer could inquire his friend's meaning. "If you dispatched your man at once, he will likely be in time to do some good. But he must keep to the east bank of the Connecticut—and well inland at that, for fear of roving parties of redskins. As for the other side of the river, the forest swarms with Pequots, and he could never get through."

"And if he went by water, with a sloop and an armed escort?" suggested Laplash.

"Then he would have a clear way. 'Tis far the best plan, mynheer."

"We'll consider it, my man," spoke up Le

Casson, "and as you've put us under some obligation will you accept this?" and he slid a golden ducat across the table.

Dirk Hobbema took the hint and the coin, and retired to the tap-room. The door closed behind him, and at once Dollier turned to Laplash and clapped him on the shoulder.

"Mon ami, our lucky star shines brightly again," he cried, heedless of Foulfoot's presence. "It points to an enterprise that can hardly fail. Sir Lanslott Charmion has great influence with the Governor of Massachusetts and with your King of England, is it not so?"

"He is a personal friend of both," assented Laplash. "He certainly stands in high favor with his Majesty Charles Stuart."

"And if he chose to exert himself he could render it possible for us to return to England in safety? In a word, he could have us pardoned?"

"Why, there's no doubt of it. But indeed ——"

"Wait till you've heard all. We are going to Wethersfield, you and I, and this Dr. Gascoyne with us. He shall save the life of

Sir Lanslott, make him to recover of his wound, and we also will be attentive by the bedside. Can such a gallant gentleman, then, fail to reward our devotion? A thousand times no. Is it settled that we depart for the Connecticut? What say you?"

"You're forgetting the risk," urged Laplash, whose face had flushed with eagerness.

"There is none to speak of. At the worst, if Sir Lanslott should die, they would never hold us as prisoners after we had come voluntarily, with our lives in our hands, on an errand of mercy. And if he lives——"

"If he lives," echoed Laplash, "and heaven grant he does, I'm convinced that he'll prove neither unforgiving nor ungrateful. Dollier, you've vastly cheered my spirits. To win a pardon, to be free to go back to England—— But that is a lesser consideration. Even if I knew that our hopes were foredoomed to failure, I would still brave much, would still undertake this journey, to do Sir Lanslott Charmion a service. We must get our plans into shape at once, Dollier. There is no time to lose."

* * * * *

The evening in the private parlor of the Black Dog was a little more than a week old when with lagging but careful steps, with wary glances right and left, four men pressed northwards through the trackless wilderness. They marched in single file, and Pybus Foulfoot, by virtue of a slight knowledge of this part of the country, led off. Next came Laplash and Le Casson, and last was Ralph Gascoyne, a dissipated-looking young man of thirty, a clever doctor and surgeon, who for some cause unknown to his companions—there were rumors of a forgery committed in London—had of recent years dwelt in the domains of the New Netherlands Company.

The expedition had been delayed by stormy weather in the Sound, and on the previous evening, when the Connecticut had been navigated for a number of miles, it was found necessary to run their sloop—she had been leaking badly for twenty-four hours—into the mouth of a creek on the east bank, where overhanging trees afforded safe hiding. From here, early the next morning, the little party of four set out to complete the journey on foot. In spite of a considerable detour—they

remembered the trader's advice to keep inland —they hoped to reach their destination by nightfall, or at least to come very little short of it. It had been settled that Foulfoot should leave them within a few miles of Wethersfield, and the sloop and her crew were to await his return before putting back to New Amsterdam.

It was now about four o'clock of the afternoon, and Laplash, who had been singularly depressed and unlike himself all that day—and indeed since the start of the expedition —showed signs of growing uneasiness as he trod in the steps of the leader. Presently, coming to a hollow among steep hills, he sat down on a fallen tree and placed his firelock beside him. The others promptly halted, not loth to enjoy a brief rest.

"Art fatigued, mon ami?" asked Le Casson.

"I'm worried," replied Vaylmer, "and I can hardly tell you why. But this dense, dark wilderness, with every mile like the last one, seems to have no ending. I imagine queer things, and especially that we've lost our bearings and are going wrong, though I

dare say that's all nonsense. Why not strike for the river and follow its course?"

"I've been thinking the same," declared Dr. Gascoyne. "Faith, the shrewdest woodcraft might well be at fault in such a barbarous country."

"You forget, sirs, that I have a compass," Foulfoot said calmly. "Be assured that I've not led you astray. A little river that flows into the Connecticut should be not far ahead, and at the mouth of it you will likely find a boat to take you across to Wethersfield. That failing, you can make signals. I'll push on a bit and look for the stream, and meanwhile do you remain here. 'Tis a good camping-place if you decide to break the journey."

"Off with you, then," assented Laplash. "And don't be long."

Fully an hour and a half elapsed, however, before Foulfoot reappeared, when he announced that he had gone as far as the stream, which was within several miles; but as night was now at hand, and all of the party were tired and hungry, they decided to stop where they were until morning.

The frugal evening meal finished, and

washed down with water from a near-by brook, a small fire, necessary for warmth, was made in a sheltered spot. Darkness fell swiftly, and soon afterward three silent forms lay stretched around the blazing wood. The fourth was missing. Foulfoot, having offered to mount guard, had slipped stealthily away the moment he was satisfied that his companions were sleeping; nor had he returned by daybreak, when for the first his absence was discovered.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN WHICH VILLAINY IS FRUSTRATED AND A PRISONER TAKEN

THE parting was over. The last farewells had been sadly spoken, and the Narragansett, impassive and taciturn as ever, had grunted a couple of words as he steadied the birchen craft for its occupant and then pushed it into the current.

The minister and Shingascung had disappeared, and the spot where they had been standing was empty, when Rufus glanced over his shoulder for the second time. A lump rose to his throat as he turned his head and paddled on, rapidly widening the distance from the faithful friends whom he might never see again. But very soon, with the natural buoyancy of youth, regret began to yield to the bright promise of the future.

"Perhaps Roger Williams was right," he said to himself, "and the best place for me is here in New England, among my own peo-

ple. And yet, to tell the truth, I don't know what I should do if Sir Lanslott Charmion repeated his offer. But I'm not likely to have the chance, so there's an end of it. I have enough to redeem as it is, and since Governor Vane has given me a fresh start I must make the most of it."

The day quickly brightened, and the shroud of early dawn lifted from the gray waters. He had traveled a mile or two, plying the paddle with shallow and infrequent strokes, when a sudden cry of distress, from no great distance to the right, broke harshly on his reveries.

"No man's voice that," he muttered. "There's a woman yonder, and in need of help."

He hesitated but an instant. The cry was repeated as he drove the canoe to the bank and leaped ashore, and it rang out again as he sped in the direction of the sound, parting the thick bushes with his firelock. Twenty yards through the forest, by the sunken bed of a water-course, and he stopped in sheer amazement, almost loth to believe his own eyes. For here in a grassy glade a lean black

bear, squatted on his hindquarters, was making feints with his forepaws toward two young girls who crouched by the trunk of a dead tree; and this pair of hapless maidens were none other than Annis Charmion and Rose Brewster.

"Rufus!" they exclaimed together at sight of him.

The bear wheeled round and snarled, and the lad advanced with a shout, swinging his firelock by the barrel. Then bruin, who had probably meant no harm, dropped to all fours and turned tail. A thumping blow on the flank hastened his flight, and he whimpered like a cub as he made off at a lumbering gait, to quickly vanish in the thickets.

"He was every bit as frightened as you were," Rufus told the girls, who clung about him eagerly, in a fervor of delight and astonishment. Their eyes were moist and their cheeks tear-stained, while the plain, serviceable clothing that they wore, the skirts dripping with dew and pierced by thorns and briars, suggested a clue that proved to be the right one. From their first incoherent words, in reply to the lad's questions, he gathered

that they belonged to the band of settlers mentioned by Roger Williams, and that they had strayed from camp and been unable to find their way back.

"We were waiting till breakfast was ready," Annis continued, "and I persuaded Rose to venture into the wood to look for snowdrops. We went on a little farther, and then followed a pretty bird, and when we wanted to return we couldn't tell which direction to take. You won't leave us here, will you?"

"Surely not," vowed Rufus. "It will suit my plans just as well to join your party, if I can find the camp. I have no idea where it lies, though if we bear to the north ——"

"Oh, you dare not go back with us," Rose broke in sadly, regarding him with a troubled and wistful expression. "You forget, Rufus, that you are a—a ——" She hesitated.

"There is a warrant hanging over me, you mean?" asked the lad, smiling. "Why, I am as free as you or Annis. Listen, Rose. I have the Governor's pardon—at least it amounts to the same thing—and I have left Roger Williams and his companions and am now on my way to Hartford, where I am to

report to Captain Mason for active service."

"Rufus! is this really true?" cried Rose. "How glad I am!"

"And I," exclaimed Annis, her dark eyes flashing with pleasure.

"'Tis quite true," Rufus assured them, "so you see I've nothing to fear. On the contrary, I'm glad of the chance to proceed in the company of old friends, if I may call them such."

"You know the most of them," said Rose. "There are my parents and Humfrey, and my mother's uncle and his sons, and many more. Some are for Hartford and some for Wethersfield. In all we are nearly fifty, including an escort of soldiers."

"But what kept you so long on the journey? When did you leave Boston?"

"More than ten days ago," Rose replied. "We traveled very slowly, for there were children to be cared for, and cattle to be driven, and at times we had no path to guide us."

"And how does Mistress Charmion come to be with you?"

"I am going to my father," Annis told him; and her eyes filled at the question. "He went to the Connecticut Valley during the winter, and now lies wounded at Wethersfield."

"I'm deeply grieved to hear this," said Rufus, to whom the news of his generous-hearted patron's misfortune came as a shock and a surprise. "What a plucky girl you are! But that I've known from the first, since you wanted to face the mob at Plymouth. I shouldn't worry about Sir Lanslott. You will find him out of danger, or quite recovered, I've no doubt."

"The suspense has been almost more than I could endure," faltered Annis. "He was seriously ill, they told me. And I hoped to be with him to-day."

"Why, so you shall," vowed Rufus. "We'll set off at once in search of the camp, and as likely as not we shall meet some of the party on the way. I'm afraid, though, that you've wandered a long distance. Of course you kept shouting for help when you found that you were lost?"

"Oh! we didn't dare to," cried Rose. "We

were careful not to make a sound. I forgot to tell you—we saw two Indians."

"Indians?" echoed the lad.

"Yes, two hideous savages streaked with black paint. It was just after we tried to go back, and for fear they should hear us ——"

"They passed close in front of us," Annis broke in, "but they never looked to right or left, so we had time to hide behind a tree."

"Pequots on the war-path," muttered Rufus, half aloud. "And there must be more of them in the neighborhood." He peered uneasily into the dense thickets surrounding the glade, and examined the priming of his musket. "Now don't be frightened," he said cheerfully. "But what you've told me alters our plans. My canoe is within a few yards, and instead of attempting to find the camp—which you can understand would be risky—I'll take you straight to Wethersfield by water. Then I'll return, with as many men as can be spared, to meet your friends and let them know that you are safe."

Their ready acquiescence was a secret relief to Rufus, for he was in dread of discovery

from prowling redskins, who might have followed the trail of the two girls. He hastily guided his companions to the stream, and having disposed them comfortably, Annis in the bow and Rose near the middle of the canoe, he seated himself in the stern and began to paddle with long, deep strokes.

"This is delightful," said Rose, "especially after one has walked or ridden on horseback for days and days."

"'Tis a great deal faster, too," replied Rufus, who was no longer troubled by anxiety. "But how ravenously hungry you must be, if you came away before breakfast. I'm sorry I haven't anything to offer you. However, they'll remedy that at Wethersfield. We should do the eight or nine miles well inside of two hours, if all goes well."

"Do you hear, Annis?" exclaimed Rose. "In two hours!"

The weather showed signs of changing. A rising wind, bleak and wintry, moaned among the pine-trees. The lad kept to mid-stream, where the current was strongest, and as he drove the light craft forward he entertained his companions with an account of his wan-

derings in the forest, during the weeks of exile that were happily at an end.

"Hark!" exclaimed Rose, interrupting the narrative. "There are rapids below."

"They won't harm us," said Rufus. "'Twill be fine sport to run through them. Hold the firelock, please, so it isn't jolted about."

A dull, roaring noise could be heard, and it suddenly grew louder as a bend of the channel revealed a streak of foamy white extending from shore to shore. The canoe, now caught in the suction, sped on with increasing speed. Skilfully managed by the lad, it leaped like a feather amid the splashing surge, and the girls uttered little screams as they felt the pitching motion and saw the heavy rollers tumbling about them. Choppy waves began to smack against the frail craft, which rode triumphantly toward the eddying pool at the lower end of the falls.

"We're safely through," exclaimed Rufus.

Just then he was startled by the discovery that water was oozing in at his feet, and the next instant, with a gurgling sound, a thick jet spouted up between his knees, bringing

with it an oval-shaped piece of birch-bark. To check the flood was impossible, even had there been time. It poured and bubbled through the hole in the bottom—for which the half-dazed lad could not account—and almost immediately the canoe filled and sank, leaving its three occupants struggling on the surface of the stream.

The current ran several ways at this point, and Rose and Annis, buoyed up by the inflation of their clothing, were quickly carried three or four yards apart. Rufus, as he kept himself afloat, was for a couple of seconds in a terrible dilemma, unable to decide which of the two girls he should first render assistance to, for both were in peril.

"Save Annis," cried Rose. "I'm a good swimmer, and can reach the shore without help."

The lad hesitated no longer. Annis was nearest to him, and overhauling her by a few rapid strokes, he took a tight grip of her arm.

"You're all right now," he told her. "Keep cool, and don't try to catch hold of me."

Though badly frightened—her skirt had

ALMOST IMMEDIATELY THE CANOE FILLED AND SANK

begun to drag her down—the girl obeyed the command and submitted passively to her rescuer. Swept into comparatively quiet waters, where the struggle was easier, they made slow but steady progress toward the north bank. Rose, swimming bravely, soon gained the shore, and a moment later Rufus landed his charge a short distance below. All three were more or less exhausted. Dripping wet, they shivered in the keen wind.

"I've lost your musket," wailed Rose, her teeth chattering. "I had to drop it or sink. What happened, Rufus? Did a rock tear a hole in the bottom?"

"It must have been that," said Annis. "The water gushed in all of a sudden."

"'Twas not a rock," declared Rufus. "I know as little about it as yourselves."

"What are we to do?" exclaimed Rose. "How shall we reach Wethersfield?"

The lad shook his head gloomily. "Unless I can recover the canoe, and mend it," he replied, "we'll have to start in search of your friends."

It was far from likely that the craft would come to the surface, the water being deep and

sluggish, but on the chance of it Rufus left his companions and ran swiftly down the narrow margin of shore, his eyes fixed on the stream. He had gone twenty yards or more, and had quite lost hope of succeeding in his quest, when he saw a floating speck which he fancied he recognized. It had drifted close in, and to splash in pursuit of it was an impulse instantly carried out. He waded back, shaking himself vigorously, and examined with startled attention the oval piece of birch-bark that he held in his hand.

"Here's a mystery," he said aloud. "This has been cut with a knife, and cunningly fastened in place again—the edges are smeared with sticky gum. It must have been done after Shingascung overhauled the canoe; his sharp eyes couldn't have missed it. But I can't imagine who ——"

A quick rustling of branches, and a low, venomous chuckle, give him a fright. He heard his name called in a hoarse whisper, and looking up to the wooded bank of the stream, which rose steeply in front of him, he saw the long barrel of a musket protuding from the foliage and pointed straight at his

breast. And at the farther end of the weapon, framed in the black shadow of pine-boughs, was the face of Pybus Foulfoot.

"I've got you for sure this time, you whelp," snarled the ruffian. "You had better have been drowned, as I meant you to be, though a bullet will serve the same purpose. Say your prayers, for you'll be dead in thirty seconds. I'll allow you so much grace."

Rufus shuddered, but not with cold. For what seemed a little eternity, while thoughts crowded fast on his mind, he stood looking death in the face, impelled by a terrible fascination to keep his eyes on the muzzle of the firelock and the gloating countenance behind it.

From the tangle of red beard came a harsh voice relentlessly counting the seconds. Twenty-seven, twenty-eight, twenty-nine —— And then, just as the lad's agony found vent in a wild cry, two hands fastened on Foulfoot's throat from the rear. The weapon exploded harmlessly in the air, and the next instant the would-be murderer and Humfrey Brewster rolled down the slope and nearly

to the water's edge, locked tightly together.

A desperate struggle ensued, but it was speedily brought to a finish when Rufus, who was at first faint and dizzy, woke up to the situation and lent a hand. Overpowered by his captors, his arms securely bound with his own belt, Foulfoot accepted defeat without further resistance. The lads hauled him to a sitting posture and propped him against a rock.

"If you try any of your tricks," threatened Rufus, "I'll kill you as I would a dog."

He called to the girls, who had been timidly watching the scene from a distance. They now hastened to the spot, and at sight of them Humfrey's delight was unbounded.

"Well, this is luck," he exclaimed. "We've been searching for you everywhere, and you can imagine how worried we've all been."

"Rufus found us," replied Rose, as she embraced her brother. "He was taking us to Wethersfield in a canoe, and we had an accident."

"You look like it," said Humfrey. "You must get into dry clothing as soon as you can.

The rest of the party are not far off, and that shot will fetch them in a hurry. 'Tis good to see you again, Rufus," he added. "D'you know what a narrow escape you had?—you'll never be nearer death than you were a bit ago. I caught a glimpse of the scoundrel, as he skulked among the trees, and frustrated his villainy in the very nick of time."

"There's more back of it," replied Rufus; and turned to the prisoner. "'Twas you who cut the piece out of the canoe," he declared. "Don't deny it. What brought you to these parts? Are you alone?"

Foulfoot might have been the Sphinx, for all the sign he gave of hearing. His greenish eyes, filled with unutterable malevolence, watched a branch drifting down the stream.

"'Tis useless to waste breath on him," said Humfrey.

Just then shouting was heard at no great distance, and the lads raising their voices in response, scarcely a minute elapsed before Nathaniel Brewster came on the scene, accompanied by two leather-clad musketeers and by Caleb Stagg and his sons.

It was a joyful meeting, and what with the

news that Rufus had to tell, and the girls' story of their adventures, and the account of Foulfoot's capture, there was a lively clatter of tongues until an understanding had been arrived at. Rufus was heartily congratulated by his friends, including Reuben Stagg, who, as he clasped the lad's hand and noted his confusion, hastily said :

" Don't you worry about that horse of mine. I got it back all right, and there's an end of the matter."

Without further delay a start was made to join the rest of the party, by which was meant those of the settlers who were bound for Wethersfield, and who had pushed a little out of their way in order to search for the missing girls. The Hartford detachment, Nathaniel Brewster explained, had left the camp directly after breakfast and diverged to the northwest, the nearest route to their destination.

" We'd have stuck together," said Caleb Stagg, " had we known what we know now— that redskins are in the neighborhood. However, we're fairly strong in numbers, as it is, and are not likely to be attacked."

CHAPTER XXIV

IN WHICH THERE'S A RACE FOR LIFE AND A SURPRISE AT THE END OF IT

A TRAMP of a mile or more from the stream brought the little company to their anxious friends, who had halted in the forest to await the return of the stragglers. And when Rufus saw the women and children, the tents and wagons, the household goods and stores, the herd of lean cattle, he began to realize by what tedious marches, under what trying difficulties, the indomitable band of emigrants had journeyed for nearly ninety miles through the trackless wilderness, to make new homes where they might enjoy greater liberty and freedom of conscience.

Mistress Brewster had almost abandoned hope, and the poor woman wept hysterically as she embraced her daughter and Annis. Not long afterward, the girls having changed their wet attire, the motley column proceeded on toward the Connecticut, Caleb Stagg taking

command. Soldiers were at front and rear. Some of the party drove the cattle, while others safeguarded the women and children, who walked by the jolting, heavily-laden wagons. In all the men numbered fifteen, including Rufus and Humfrey, and the five musketeers who formed a half of the divided military escort, the rest having gone with the Hartford detachment. It was a sufficiently strong force to give a good account of itself if attacked, but nevertheless, in view of the fact that Indians had been seen, a feeling of uneasiness prevailed and there was a general desire to reach Wethersfield with the least possible delay.

Pybus Foulfoot, his arms bound behind him, trudged along reluctantly, with a scowling face, guarded on either side by Jonas and Reuben Stagg. He could have told, had he been so minded, a tale of murderous desire relentlessly and warily pursued; how on the previous afternoon, while pushing ahead of his party, he discovered Rufus and his friends and followed them to their camping-place; how he crept back there later, when his own comrades were asleep, and listened to the con-

versation between Roger Williams and the lad, from the top of the rocks; how, with craft worthy of a redskin, he worked his way round to the canoe, cut a piece out of the bottom, and replaced it with resinous gum. Then, as a double precaution against the remote chance of interference from Williams and Shingascung, he had swum across the stream, transporting his clothing and musket on two logs lashed together, and traveled down the opposite shore as far as the rapids, where he calculated that the rough water would bring the canoe to instant grief and put his enemy at his mercy. But he had failed in the moment of triumph.

The progress of the column was necessarily very slow. The wilderness was dense and rugged, and at times a way had to be cleared for the cattle and wagons, which advanced at little more than a crawling pace. A course was steered by the compass. Clouds sheeted the sky and obscured the sun. In anxious silence, with firelocks primed and ready to fly to shelter, the men plodded alertly, scanning every copse and thicket, fearful of what

peril might lurk in the depths of the surrounding forest.

All went well, however, until eleven o'clock of the morning, when the vanguard of musketeers broke cover and emerged on a high and grassy bluff overlooking the valley of the Connecticut. The rest of the line quickly trailed out of the timber, and voices rose in thanksgiving as the delighted settlers realized that they were nearly at the end of their long journey, that the goal was almost in sight. Within fifty yards, beyond the strip of shore at the foot of the slope, flowed the majestic river, across which the coveted realm of hills and woodlands stood out clearly. The mouth of the stream by which Rufus had intended to travel was a mile below, and the town of Wethersfield—it was invisible from this point owing to a twist of the channel—lay between four and five miles down the opposite bank. The site of it was marked by faint gray smoke blowing to westward.

A small skiff, borne in one of the wagons, was promptly lifted to the ground. Gathering his companions about him, Caleb Stagg chose two from the number and bade them

paddle to the settlement as swiftly as possible.

"You'll send the flat boats across to meet us," he added, "and meanwhile we'll push on southward as far as we're able. There's a tributary stream at no great distance below, and that's where we'll be found waiting."

He had hardly spoken, and the men had no more than laid hands on the skiff, when fiendish yells burst from the forest in the rear, and a cloud of arrows came winging viciously. A musketeer staggered and fell, a shaft buried deep in his throat. Two others were slightly wounded, and several of the cattle being hit, the remainder of the herd stampeded madly, bellowing with fright, and were immediately scattered in all directions. To recover them was out of the question.

For a moment panic and confusion reigned supreme, the neighing of horses mingling with the cries of the women and children and the excited shouting of their protectors. The redskins, with ear-splitting screeches, continued to discharge arrows; but a straggling volley fired at random into the thickets—not a sign of the foe was visible—apparently

caused some damage and temporarily drove the attacking force to deeper cover.

"They'll be rushing us next—I know the varmints," cried Caleb Stagg. "Look you, comrades, there's only one thing can save us from destruction, and that's a doubtful chance. But I remember seeing, when I was in these parts a year ago, a palisaded house not far from here—less than a mile up-river. If it has not been burned since, and we can manage to reach it, we're strong enough to hold the place till help arrives from Wethersfield."

"'Tis Ned Darby's house," put in a soldier who had served under Governor Winthrop. "I mind it well. 'Twas as strong as a fortress."

"Let us seek it without delay," exclaimed Nathaniel Brewster. "Be not weak of heart, my friends. Heaven will guide and protect us."

"Down with you, quick!" commanded Caleb Stagg. "To the water—we can make better speed there, and will be farther out of range. But 'twill be a race for life, I'm thinking. Careful with the horses. Don't hurry them."

The savages, for some inexplicable reason, were as yet holding aloof. Not many seconds had elapsed since the first alarm, and a half minute more—after an awkward and perilous descent—found the whole convoy safe at the foot of the bluff, between which and the brink of the Connecticut stretched a fairly wide margin of pebbles and sandy soil, coarse grass and stunted bushes.

The women and children—the former pale and trembling and the latter whimpering with fear—were hastily stowed in the leading covered wagon and Foulfoot was thrust into the second. The former's load, with the exception of enough goods to erect an arrow-proof barricade on the dangerous side, was divided between the other vehicles. Then the flight began, and none dared prophesy how it would end.

"They're going to make it warm for us, father," said Jonas Stagg.

The prediction was speedily verified. Arrows, winged invisibly, described curves high in air and dropped among the anxious party. Worse followed as the Indians, now reinforced and growing bolder, ventured out of the tim-

ber line and showed themselves here and there on the crest of the gently-sloping bluff. For a quarter of a mile a running fight was thus kept up, and not without loss on both sides. The settlers poured a steady fire, half of them holding their weapons in reserve while the others loaded; and the accuracy of their aim, as they coolly potted the dusky forms outlined on the heights, was more than once proved by a warrior's death shriek and a glimpse of a tumbling body. Thicker and faster came the arrows, louder rang the savage yells. A horse attached to the rearmost wagon fell dead, and not five seconds later its mate was crippled. There was a brief delay, the vehicle and its contents were abandoned, and the convoy moved slowly on again.

"They've got us in a tight place," said Rufus. "I wonder if we'll get out of it."

"If we can reach the house—that's the last hope," panted Humfrey, as he rammed a bullet home—the two lads were side by side, displaying the courage of old veterans.

The next instant an arrow pierced Humfrey's right shoulder, and he reluctantly

obeyed Caleb Stagg's order to join the other wounded, who were to the left and sheltered side of the wagons. Rufus, boiling with rage, pulled trigger on a painted redskin who was fitting a shaft to his bow. He felt a thrill of fierce delight as the savage pitched headforemost over the bluff and landed motionless a dozen feet down.

"Well done, my boy," shouted Nathaniel Brewster.

The situation was fast becoming desperate, and haggard faces frequently turned to look across the tide to the peaceful hills beyond, or more persistently scanned the foreground. The Pequots no longer exposed themselves so freely. As they trailed in pursuit, whooping and screeching, they continued to harass the sorely-tried fugitives from every bit of cover. Two soldiers were dead and left behind, including the man who had fallen in the first surprise. Five of the party were wounded, two of them so severely that they had been thrust in among the women and children. The wagon hoods bristled with arrows, and one of the leading horses, hit in the flank, struggled on with difficulty. Still there was

no sign of the fortified house, nor was there much hope of finding it tenable.

They were now drawing near to a low hummock covered with stones and bushes, extending almost to the water's edge, which hid the view beyond. The vanguard pushed around the base of this, and at once started to cheer excitedly and to point ahead. The rest of the convoy eagerly followed, and all eyes beheld a most welcome and cheering sight. At a distance of considerably less than a quarter of a mile, on a plateau of high ground, stood a lofty palisade with a timbered gate set midway in it, and over the top could be seen a chimney and part of a roof. To one side of the enclosure the Connecticut flowed within seventy or eighty feet, and on the opposite side the line of the bluff receded for a couple of hundred yards.

"We'll be safe enough there," exclaimed Caleb Stagg. "Forward, comrades! We'll make a quick dash for it. Why! the place is surely occupied," he added, perceiving a thin wisp of smoke rising in the air.

"Ay, and by white men," declared Nathaniel Brewster. "Look!"

As he spoke the big gate was thrown open, and forthwith emerged two figures clad in gray. They took off their hats and waved them with unmistakable gestures.

"Friends!" cried Rufus. "Hurra! hurra!"

The redskins, grasping the fact that they were likely to be robbed of their prey, showed themselves more boldly. With fierce yells, as if they intended to sweep down in force, they collected at the point where the crest of the high ground began to curve inland. Arrows flew in a cloud, and were answered by flashes of fire and crashing reports, as the settlers poured a final volley at the foe. Whips cracked on the air, the straining horses broke into a gallop, and after them, amid shouting and clamor, the wagons bounded and jolted.

It was a thrilling race, and a brief one. Soon the river shore commenced to rise, but by the united efforts of the party, by much pushing and tugging, the ascent to the plateau was quickly made. A minute later, without mishap, the wagons had clattered through the open gateway and into the enclosure. The rear guard followed, looking over their shoulders in expectation of an attack that was not

at present to be feared ; for the Pequots, having abandoned the attack, had withdrawn behind the bluff.

"Why, if it ain't Philemon Kent! And yonder's Tom Gunstone!" cried Caleb Stagg, as he recognized old acquaintances in the two supposed strangers.

"Man, I'm glad to see you," said Philemon Kent, as he clasped Stagg's hand. "You and your friends have had a close call. However, I'm thinking you will be safe enough here, though there's no telling." He drove the heavy gate shut and dropped the cross-bars into their sockets, then put his eyes to a loop-hole in the palisade. "No sign of the varmints," he added, "but they'll be up to some mischief by and by, depend on it."

The horses, steaming and exhausted, stood breathing painfully. The women and children had climbed out of the wagons, and the wounded were being lifted to the ground.

"How many are you?" inquired Caleb Stagg.

"Three all told," replied Philemon Kent, "including a gentleman whom we were to have escorted to Boston. He's too ill to go

any farther. Luckily your party is a pretty strong one, and we should be able to hold out if we're attacked. Why, there's Nathaniel Brewster. And is that his daughter Rose next him?"

"'Tis Mistress Charmion ——"

"Charmion?" demanded Kent. "Not the daughter of the King's deputy?"

"Ay, the same," Stagg assured him. "She traveled with us to seek her father, who lies wounded at Wethersfield. No doubt you can tell me what news there is ——"

"I can do more than that," interrupted Kent. "Come indoors, man, and fetch the maid with you."

He led the way to the house, accompanied by half a dozen others, and as they entered a man who lay on a rude bed by the fireplace lifted himself on one elbow with a startled exclamation. The next instant, with a glad cry of "Father! father!" Annis had darted across the room and was folded in Sir Lanslott's arms.

CHAPTER XXV

IN WHICH PYBUS FOULFOOT PLAYS HIS LAST PART

WITHIN twenty-four hours after the Dutch trader's departure from Wethersfield Sir Lanslott Charmion had taken a turn for the better. The improvement was continuous and rapid, and in a little more than a week he was able to leave his bed. Then, learning that news of his illness had been sent to the Bay, knowing what anxiety and suspense his daughter must be in, he determined to set off for Boston at once. With two companions he started at daybreak, that same morning when Caleb Stagg's party were encamped within a few miles of Wethersfield. The three were ferried over the Connecticut and landed a mile below the empty house, on nearing which—they meant to keep to the river for a time before striking inland—the breaking out afresh of the baronet's wound brought the journey to

an unfortunate termination and compelled an immediate halt.

Such was the story as first related by Philemon Kent, and it was subsequently told in fuller detail by Sir Lanslott himself. His condition gave rise to some anxiety, for he was flushed with fever and suffering pain; but the presence of Annis had already done wonders. He was much brighter and in the best of spirits, vowing that all he needed was rest, and that he would soon be on his feet again.

"Governor Vane has acted wisely and generously," he said to Rufus when he had heard of the lad's altered circumstances. "He has given you another chance, and I trust you will show yourself worthy of it."

"I mean to do that, sir," Rufus replied.

Annis flashed a quick look at him, which said as plainly as words that he would regain all that he had forfeited. He went away from the bedside with his thoughts in a whirl.

The time was now an hour past noonday, and all was quiet, without and within. Pybus Foulfoot, still sullen and tongue-tied, had been bound to a hind-wheel of one of the wagons. The horses were stabled, and the women and

children were comfortably quartered in the house, which was a stout structure of logs, pierced with loopholes; it had three rooms on the lower floor, and a great loft overhead. The wounded had received every attention, and with one exception were about again, Humfrey among the number.

A narrow platform, raised five feet above the ground, ran along the whole four sides of the palisade. Here armed men were pacing to and fro, scanning the open stretch to north and south, and watching river and forest. But the Indians might have been a hundred miles away, for all the indication they gave of their presence, nor was there any sign of a relief-party as far as the eye could command the sweep of the Connecticut.

"A messenger might get safely through," Nathaniel Brewster suggested to a little group near the gate.

"'Twould be sending him to his death," declared Caleb Stagg. "No boat is to be had —'tis unfortunate we left the skiff behind—so how could he cross the river? And the redskins would be after him at once. They're lying under cover, and biding their time."

"Ay, ay, that's right," assented the others.

"Don't you suppose they heard our musket-shots at Wethersfield?" asked Rufus.

"'Tis most uncertain, lad," replied Philemon Kent. "They might see the smoke from yonder chimney, perhaps, but they would pay little attention to it, thinking that Pequots were in the neighborhood. And then again, even if they did hear the sound of firing, I doubt if they would do anything until the garrison was strengthened. A party of twenty men went south this morning to search for a sloop that was expected up from Saybrook, and was several days overdue."

"Well, there's no need to worry, as I can see," put in Caleb Stagg. "We're safe enough for the present. We have plenty of powder and ball, and a week's supply of food."

"And there's a well of sweet water back of the house," said Tom Gunstone. "Best to look the situation square in the face," he added, "for I'll tell you what it is, comrades, we'll have at least one tussle with the redskins before help comes. They'll never let the sun go down on their wrath."

Gunstone was a true prophet. The north-

ward stretch of the plateau being thickly overgrown with bushes to within a couple of furlongs of the house, and having on the west a steep drop to the margin of the Connecticut, a splendid chance was afforded the enemy of creeping unperceived to close quarters. This they did very cunningly, and about two o'clock, a sentry giving timely alarm, a band of not less than one hundred Pequots were seen to pour over the rim of the embankment.

All available men were promptly on the platforms, ready to deal death from the loopholes, and muskets were fired as fast as they could be loaded. With fanatical courage and determination the foe rained a storm of blows with their tomahawks and battle-axes, but made little or no impression on the stout timbers. Some fell in this futile attempt, and others, who scrambled to the top of the palisade and tried to climb over, were either beaten back with clubbed weapons or killed as they dropped to the platform. There was an anxious minute when the issue seemed doubtful, but in the end the redskins withdrew as suddenly as they had come, carrying

their wounded off the field and leaving eight or nine dead behind. The little garrison had sustained no loss whatever.

"That'll teach them a lesson," said Caleb Stagg.

"They won't give up yet," replied Gunstone, shaking his head gloomily. "'Twas no more than half of their force, I'm thinking, that we were engaged with. Next time they'll try different tactics."

"Ay, as like as not," assented Philemon Kent. "That's the worst of an Indian—he never knows when he's had enough."

There was some further conversation in the same strain, for these Puritan fighting-men were too wise and far-seeing to overestimate the value of their victory, or to imagine that the repulse of the Pequots meant the end of the siege. But the womenfolk learned the good news with feelings of unalloyed delight, while Sir Lanslott Charmion was, of course, confirmed in the view which he had been persuaded to take; namely, that there was no occasion for anxiety.

"He is a very sick man," Nathaniel Brewster said to his wife, "and should have

proper medical care. 'Tis out of the question, though—there was no doctor to be had while he lay at Wethersfield, I'm told."

"We must do the best we can," replied Mistress Brewster. "But I am worried about him, Nathaniel. His illness requires more than herbs and simples."

Nothing could have seemed more wildly improbable than that the urgently-needed want would be speedily supplied, yet stranger things have happened, and Providence was working in mysterious ways that afternoon.

A couple of hours dragged monotonously by, a vigilant and continuous watch being kept from every quarter, and then, at a little past four o'clock, a distant gun-shot was heard, and was immediately followed by a shout from a sentry who was posted on the south side of the stockade, in which the gate was set. Rufus, who had been in the house talking to Rose and Annis, ran hastily with others, and was among the first to mount the platform.

The eager garrison naturally scanned the river, hoping to see the expected relief-force from Wethersfield, and as quickly, nothing being visible there, all eyes turned in the op-

posite direction, to the southward stretch of the bluff that rose two hundred yards behind the enclosure. Here lay the scene of interest, and here a desperate race for life was just entering on its initial stage. A moment before three figures had dashed over the crest of the high ground, at a point slightly under half a mile away, and were now descending the slope by leaps and bounds, while after them trailed a horde of yelling savages. They sped on swiftly, straight toward the palisade, and as soon as they reached the level the distance between pursuers and pursued—'twas forty yards or so—began perceptibly to lessen.

"Can they be redskins deserting to us?" exclaimed Tom Gunstone.

"Nay, they're white men," declared Rufus, whose eyes were uncommonly sharp. "I can make them out plainly."

"What possessed them to challenge such odds?" muttered Philemon Kent. "They run like deer—but the Indians are fleeter. They'll never get through."

"D'you mean to see the poor fellows butchered before our very eyes?" cried Caleb

Stagg. "Surely not. Come, we'll go out to meet them."

"And be cut off from the stockade?" roared Kent. "Who knows how many redskins are lurking yonder by the river bottom? Man, where are your wits?"

"You're right," admitted Stagg. "But what else can we do?"

"Ay, what else?" echoed Gunstone.

"There's one chance, perhaps," cried Kent. "I'll show you."

With that he leaped to the ground, the rest springing after him, and in a trice he had unbarred the heavy gate and thrown it wide open.

"Stand ready," he shouted, "and directly the fugitives get in—if they're able to hold the lead—give the redskins a volley. Then slam the gate shut in their faces, and scatter for the loopholes. And meanwhile keep an eye on the riverside, against surprise."

The little group of spectators clustered in the gateway, thrilled with excitement as they watched the progress of the race. Dashing over the plain, drawing steadily nearer, came the plucky three, bare-headed and empty-

handed. They were within a quarter of a mile now, and the short distance yet to be traversed, the sight of friends and safety at the goal, spurred them to almost superhuman efforts. But eight young warriors, sounder of wind than the rest, were pressing on with unflagging strength, and very obviously gaining. They were no more than a dozen yards in the rear, and must soon overhaul their intended victims. They were unarmed except for small weapons carried in their hands and at their girdles, and since they hurled none of these—they might have done so with deadly effect—it was evident that they meant, out of sheer bravado, to use the tomahawk and the scalping-knife at close quarters.

"We can't fire without fear of hitting the others, worse luck," exclaimed Caleb Stagg. "D'you think the poor fellows will get in?—a hundred yards more, and they're safe."

"There's no hope," said Humfrey. "'Tis heart-sickening to stand here idle and wait for those poor men to be——" Clutching Rufus by the arm, he exclaimed eagerly: "Look! look! surely one of the three is Vaylmer Laplash—the one to the right."

"Why, so it is!" Rufus gasped in astonishment. "And the one in the middle is Dollier Le Casson. The third I don't know—he's a stranger."

"They'll never do it," vowed Philemon Kent, as the tragic end was seen to be imminent. "God help them! Men, be ready with a volley."

"I can't stand this," cried Rufus. "Who follows?"

Urged by an impulse that he was powerless to resist, the brave lad darted forward. As quickly Caleb Stagg was at his heels, and with lusty shouts four more sped after the two. The distance was short, and the little party covered ground with strenuous leaps. They had made the attempt not a second too soon, and, as it was, they were likely to fail. They were less than five yards from the imperiled men when Le Casson, wheeling suddenly round in despair, threw himself upon the foremost pursuer, who had been about to brain him with an axe. The two struggled and fell, and at the same instant, an Indian who was farther back hurled a tomahawk; the weapon struck Laplash on the head and

whizzed past him, though the force of the blow brought him down.

The third fugitive, spent and breathless, staggered up to the rescuers. They let him go by, and then, rushing on a few paces, half of them discharged their muskets, killing or disabling three of the pursuers. With the butt of his piece Caleb Stagg despatched Le Casson's assailant and helped the young Frenchman to his feet, and meanwhile Rufus, finding Laplash in a stunned condition, had with some difficulty hoisted him upon his back. With a glance around him the lad set off as fast as he could go, his broad shoulders bent under the weight they carried.

"That's enough, men," shouted Caleb Stagg. "Don't go a step further. Save your powder and ball."

It was all done and over in a twinkling. The remainder of the Indians had fled, losing another of their number as they went. Through the pungent drift of smoke, screeched at from a distance by the onlooking groups of savages, the brave fellows dashed back to their anxious comrades. Amid hearty cheers they entered the stock-

ade, Rufus coming last with his burden, and immediately the gate was closed and barred. If redskins were lurking under the river bank, they had unaccountably missed a rare chance.

"Were you crazy?" thundered Philemon Kent. "D'you know that you might have—— But there! you've saved three lives, and I'll say no more."

The rescued fugitives were the centre of attraction, though their presence in the enclosure did not delay the prompt posting of sentries on the platform. Among those who had been drawn from the house by the commotion and firing were Rose and Annis, and the latter was looking on with flushed cheeks and dilated eyes that betrayed her agitation. Dr. Ralph Gascoyne—he was the strange member of the trio—was leaning against the palisade, fighting hard for his breath. Le Casson, though equally exhausted, had no thought save for his friend.

"Monsieur, tell me that he is not dead," he pleaded hoarsely as he staggered up to Rufus, who had placed Laplash on the ground and was stooping over him.

"Indeed, sir, he is scarcely hurt," the lad

replied. "See! there's a lump on his skull where the tomahawk grazed him."

"Ay, I'm as sound as ever," put in Laplash himself, opening his eyes. "I was only partly stunned by the blow, for I remember all that happened." He insisted on rising, and when helped to his feet he was able to stand on his trembling limbs.

"Vaylmer, mon ami!" Le Casson cried in delight.

"Dollier, my dear fellow!" and they clasped hands as if they had just met after a separation of months.

"'Twas you saved my life," said Laplash, turning to Rufus with a look of gratitude, "whereas, by the memory of your wrongs, you should have left me to my fate. I'm heavily in your debt, my boy, and believe me ——"

He stopped with an exclamation of surprise, having that instant caught sight of Annis. Seeing that she was recognized, the girl shrank away from him, and moved behind Rose.

"May I inquire, sir, what brought you to these parts?" spoke up Caleb Stagg, in a

harsh and suspicious tone; he had meanwhile been conversing in whispers with Nathaniel Brewster and several others.

"'Tis a short story, and you shall have it at once," Laplash calmly replied. "We are bound from New Amsterdam to Wethersfield, and last night we lay in the forest a short distance from here. Toward noon to-day, coming to a stream that flows yonder, we built a raft with the intention of drifting down to the Connecticut. But seeing a couple of canoes filled with savages below us, we made a hasty landing and proceeded in this direction through the forest, which, as you may imagine, involved us in fresh misfortunes. We got a glimpse of your stockade from the high ground, and at the same time discovered large bodies of Indians to right and left of us. There was only one thing to do, and we did it. Throwing away our firearms, so that we might run the faster, we started on the race for life."

"Helas! and what a race!" exclaimed Le Casson. "Messieurs, we should have been scalped but for your noble efforts."

"You were bold men to venture into such

company," Caleb Stagg said coldly. "And your errand to Wethersfield—will you explain that?"

"There sits the explanation, sir;" and Laplash pointed to Ralph Gascoyne. "The man is an English doctor of some skill, long resident in New Amsterdam, and we were fetching him to the aid of Sir Lanslott Charmion, of whose serious illness we were aware. I trust that it is not too late to be of service to him."

A low murmur of voices, and a dubious wagging of heads, greeted this statement. In the brief silence that ensued Annis pushed through the group.

"Why, my father is here!" she cried.

"Here?" echoed Laplash. "Do you mean it?"

"He lies in yonder house, tossing with pain and fever. Is it true, Vaylmer, what you've said?"

"Every word, sweet mistress."

"Oh, how thoughtful and generous of you!" exclaimed the girl. "How can I thank you? And this man is a doctor, you tell me? Pray come, sir, at once, to my father's side."

"With pleasure, fair lady," replied Gascoyne, bowing with courtly grace.

Unfastening a small black box that was strapped to his waist, he hastened after Annis. Laplash, starting to follow them, found the path blocked by Caleb Stagg, who sharply demanded:

"Your name is Vaylmer Laplash, I'm told?"

"It is, sir."

"And t'other one," indicating the Frenchman, "is called Le Casson?"

"You are quite right."

"That's enough, then. As for your story, it may or may not be true. But since warrants are held for the arrest of both of you—I need not mention the charges—'tis my duty to put you under arrest."

"You have proper authority, I suppose?" said Laplash, flushing deeply.

"I've the right of every honest citizen to apprehend a felon. I'll answer for that to Governor Winthrop, before whom you will appear as soon as circumstances permit of your being conveyed to Hartford."

"Parbleu! is this to be our reward for a deed of mercy?" exclaimed Le Casson, shrug-

ging his shoulders. "And the blame is mine, mon ami. Ah, why did you listen to me?"

"Courage, Dollier, 'twill come right in the end," said Laplash. "I never doubted but that our errand would be a guarantee of safety," he went on, turning to Caleb Stagg. "Sir Lanslott Charmion will certainly have a word to say in our favor. I beg that you will let me see him at once."

"I'll take no such responsibility," was the reply, "while Sir Lanslott is in his present condition. To-morrow, perhaps, I may mention your request to him. By-the-by, d'you happen to have lost one of your party?"

"Ay, there were four of us," Laplash answered on the spur of the moment, then betrayed signs of confusion.

"And where's the fourth man?"

"He disappeared from our camp last night, and was not seen afterward."

Caleb Stagg smiled grimly and whispered to a couple of his men, who hurried across the enclosure to the wagons and quickly returned with Pybus Foulfoot. They thrust the prisoner forward, his arms still bound,

and confronted him with Laplash and Le Casson.

"Is this your missing comrade?" Stagg demanded.

"It is," Laplash admitted.

"Well, sir, perhaps you'd like to hear what he's been up to. Attempted murder, no less. 'Twas only by God's mercy that Master Jennicom escaped."

"Master Jennicom?" exclaimed Laplash. "Foulfoot, is this true?" he added sternly. "What have you to say?"

"'Tis not true, as you might know," declared the knave, with a cunning leer. "I've fallen among enemies, and they want to swear my life away. Come, sir, speak up," he continued in a lower tone that held a threat. "I look to you to get me out of this scrape."

"To me?"

"Ay, and 'tis no use to pretend you don't understand."

Laplash started violently, as if an inkling of the truth had suddenly flashed to his brain. "My boy, will you let me hear your story?" he asked quietly of Rufus.

Having no desire to spare the ruffian, little

dreaming of the fierce passions that his words were to let loose, Rufus revealed, so far as he could fit the links together, the dastardly plot by which he had nearly lost his life. By way of corroboration, though none was needed, Humfrey told of his timely and providential arrival on the scene.

"You treacherous dog! You black-hearted, cowardly scoundrel!" cried Laplash, turning upon Foulfoot with blazing eyes. "So that's why you slipped away from camp—to commit foul murder, to make an end of the brave lad you've long hated because more than once he's thwarted your evil projects. Look you, sirrah, I've done with you for good and all, and I wish you had never crossed my path. By heavens, if I were your judge you should hang this minute. 'Twill not be many hours, I trust, till you dance in air."

"You throw me over, then?" Foulfoot asked hoarsely.

"Ay, gladly," Laplash exclaimed. "Off with you to the gallows."

Foulfoot laughed—a mirthless, bitter laugh of despair and hate.

"You've put the rope about my neck, and

I'll do the same for you," he snarled, trembling with rage. "If I sought to kill the lad, who prompted me to it? Who offered two hundred guineas for the death of Master Jennicom?"

"Stop!" cried Laplash, his face going from crimson to gray. "Two—hundred—guineas!" He drew a hand across his brow, and stared about him in a bewildered manner. "God forgive me," he murmured. "I—I had forgotten. If such words ever passed my lips 'twas when ——"

There was a moment of strained and breathless silence. Foulfoot, whose wrists were tugging convulsively, suddenly freed his arms from the loosened cords. In a trice, snatching a hunting-knife from the belt of a musketeer who stood beside him, he lifted the weapon and drove it deep between Laplash's ribs. As quickly, clearing a space with the reeking blade, he broke away from the spot and dashed with a frenzied howl across the enclosure, in the direction of the Connecticut.

For a second or two, so swift and daring was the deed, all were paralyzed with horror. Then some ran to Laplash and raised him

from the ground, while the rest, led by Dollier, gave hot chase to the assassin. He had already gained the palisade, and scrambling to the top like a cat, he leaped down on the outer side. By the time his pursuers mounted the platform he was nowhere in sight, having covered the short intervening distance and dropped below the shelving bank.

"Unhand me! Let me go!" cried Le Casson, for the moment a raving madman, as he struggled with those who prevented him from following the slayer of his friend.

"Hold him tight," shouted Caleb Stagg. "'Tis dangerous to leave the enclosure—and useless as well. The murderer won't escape. I'll warrant the redskins make short work of him."

He had hardly spoken when a chorus of ear-splitting whoops and yells rose on the air, and the next instant Foulfoot was seen wading frantically out into the river, toward midstream, with four painted savages splashing after him. They quickly came up with him, submerged to the waist, and a cry of agony was drowned in exultant shrieks. A tomahawk flashed and fell, and for a brief instant

a dripping scalp was held aloft. Then Foulfoot's mutilated body sank, and back sped the Indians to the shelter of the bank. They were at the mercy of the group on the platform, but not a shot was fired.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN WHICH VAYLMER LAPLASH SPEAKS, AND THE DAWN BREAKS IN RED FURY

THE day of many events, begun with hopeful anticipations and protracted through hours of strife and peril and apprehension, was slowly drawing to an end.

The sentries, grimly silent and troubled, kept vigil with loaded muskets, watching from all four sides of the enclosure. A little group of men stood by the gate, discussing the chances of help from Wethersfield, and the reasons why it was so long delayed; which subject had, for the time being, put the recent tragedy from their thoughts. Vaylmer Laplash lay mortally wounded in the house, where his devoted comrades were doing all that was possible for him. Thanks to the skill of Dr. Gascoyne, and the potent drugs he had brought with him, Sir Lanslott Charmion's condition was much improved. He was now sleeping peacefully, and Annis had been as-

sured that the relapse was not a serious matter, though convalescence might be very slow. She, like the others of her sex, was far from suspecting the fears which the men openly admitted among themselves.

"If the Pequots meant to attack us again, why did they waste the afternoon?" said Rufus, who was one of the party by the gate. "Perhaps they've gone off."

"Not a bit of it, lad," replied Tom Gunstone, as he put his eyes to a loophole. "They are lurking yonder as thick as ever, depend on it. But 'tis contrary to their nature to fight by dark, so we're safe till the dawn, anyway."

"Man, you're right," assented Caleb Stagg. "While by day a redskin is as full of contrivance as an egg is of meat, he may be trusted to lie low after nightfall. If we're to be left in peace till the morning, perhaps one of us may be able to slip off to the settlement. 'Tis too far for the sound of musketry-fire to carry, and unless——" He stopped as footsteps rapidly approached. "Here comes the doctor," he said in an undertone.

"Ay, and his face tells the worst," muttered Philemon Kent.

Ralph Gascoyne looked haggard and ill. Singling Rufus out from the throng, he tapped him on the shoulder.

"You're wanted yonder," said he. "Laplash sent me, and the sooner you go to him the better."

"Is he very bad, then?" asked Rufus.

"He is dying, my lad," was the blunt reply. "He can't last much longer."

Why Rufus had been summoned he did not know, save that it must have something to do with Foulfoot's incredible accusation. Stirred by pity more than by curiosity, he made his way to the house. He passed through the outer room where Sir Lanslott lay, and on the threshold of the rear apartment Le Casson and Nathaniel Brewster brushed by him. He entered alone, and some one closed the door softly.

"That you, Jennicom?" inquired a voice that was sadly changed yet recognizable.

"Ay, you sent for me," Rufus answered.

His eyes growing accustomed to the gloom —the only window was high up in the wall— he moved forward to the rude bed on which Vaylmer Laplash was stretched, his head and

shoulders slightly raised among pillows stuffed with maize-husks. His eyes were bright, and patches of carmine burned on each cheek.

"Stand here," he said, "where I can see you. I've much on my mind that must be told—why! you're never grieving for me. For me, who have wronged you so deeply!"

"You never wronged me, sir."

"Ay, but I have," Laplash insisted earnestly. "Listen, my boy. Come closer. My time is short, and I would speak while I've strength left and am in little pain. Tell me how much you know of your own history, of your parentage."

"I only know that I am the son of Carver Jennicom and his wife Patience," Rufus answered, thinking the question to be prompted by a fevered and disordered mind.

"And that is just what you are not. You're quite unaware, then, of the truth? Madman that I was to put any faith in Foulfoot, to believe that you were other than ignorant and undesigning!"

For a moment, after this astounding statement, there was silence in the room, except for the quick, deep breathing of the two as

they gazed steadily into each other's eyes. From without the house echoed the tread of pacing sentries and the thud of a firelock brought to earth.

"My boy," Laplash said at length, "you are my blood relation, my cousin through your mother's side of the family. She was my aunt, my mother's sister, and your father was Charles Vaylmer, of Cranbrook Hall, in Hampshire, England, which is near to my home and to the seat of Sir Lanslott Charmion. As for yourself, Arthur Vaylmer is your rightful name, and you're the heir to riches of which I've long deprived you, though till recently I had no idea that you were in existence."

"Do you really mean this?" gasped Rufus.

"On my soul 'tis true, every word of it," swore Laplash. "Foulfoot has told me, though I'd have put little faith in his statement, had it not been supported by incidents that come within my own memory, by much that I was told as a boy. You are the son and heir of an English gentleman, who was a personal friend of Sir Lanslott Charmion. And the resemblance you bear to your father—a

portrait of him hangs in our hall at home—is most striking."

Rufus believed. Conviction, sinking deep into his bewildered mind, banished the last doubt. Many things that had puzzled him before, circumstance crowding on circumstance, now stood clearly revealed. He listened eagerly, hanging on every sentence, as Laplash continued in faltering tones:

"Your father—forgive me—came of a wild race, and his end was a sad one. After your mother's death—she left him a vast fortune—he plunged headlong into dissipation, and one fatal night, when you were an infant, he and two companions lost their lives in a fire that destroyed Cranbrook Hall. And you were supposed to have perished with them, though no trace of the body could be found."

"And how ——" began Rufus.

"How did you escape, you would say? You have Carver Jennicom to thank for that, or rather Anthony Bennet, to give him the name he bore then. He was gamekeeper on the estate, and his wife Patience was your nurse. 'Twas he, I believe, who rescued you

from the flames, and hid you away for a time. They hoped by bringing you up as their son to save you from the family curse."

Laplash was silent for a moment; he was struggling hard to maintain his strength.

"I've nearly finished," he went on. "This knave of a Foulfoot was Hampshire bred also. Compelled to flee the country, he drifted to New England, penetrated Jennicom's disguise, and at length discovered his secret through a diary in which your adopted father had set down your full history ——"

"I know," exclaimed Rufus, a fresh light dawning on him.

"'Twas Foulfoot," the weak voice resumed, "who put the evil into my heart, who swore to me that you knew the whole truth and were determined to proceed to England to dispossess me. And I,—I was very near to hating you, lad. But as God is my witness I would never have done you harm. I had no share, or knowledge of, any designs on your life, though appearances were against me. As for the bid of two hundred guineas for your death, the words passed my lips in a moment of temper, when I was not myself.

Dear lad, if 'tis not too much to ask, can you forgive me?"

"Indeed, there is nothing to forgive," Rufus assured him. He could say no more, but kneeling by the side of the bed he clasped one of the dying man's fevered hands.

Laplash smiled, and his lips moved inaudibly.

"I am going fast," he said with an effort. You've a clear title to the fortune, and there are lawyers in London who will smooth the way. Yet, if you'll take my advice, you will remain in the colonies. I believe that Carver Jennicom's experiment has been a success. 'Twould be a pity to spoil you—to ——"

The faltering voice stopped entirely, but Rufus seemed still to hear it ringing in his ears, and it was as if two voices were blended in one. For the moment, his thoughts ranging far, he was back at the lonely camp in the forest, listening to Roger Williams. It was more than strange, he told himself, that the eloquent words spoken by the simple-minded minister should have been almost identical, breathing the same earnest warning, with

those which he had just heard from the lips of the worldly, reckless young profligate.

He looked down at Laplash, noted the glazing eyes and the gray hue of the cheeks, and uttered a quick cry that brought Dr. Gascoyne and several others on the scene. One glance, and the doctor shook his head. Recognizing Annis and Le Casson, who stood at either side of him, the dying man smiled faintly.

"Sweet mistress, think as kindly of me as you can," he whispered. "Dollier, ever faithful friend and comrade, be not distressed ——"

He tried to reach forth his hand, but it dropped limply. His eyelids closed.

"All is over," Nathaniel Brewster said reverently.

Annis was gently led away in tears, and Le Casson, throwing himself at the foot of the bed, wept like a child. When presently he rose his grief was under marvelous control, and not a muscle of his calm, impassive face quivered.

"My friends, I ask of you a favor," he said. "Though I am a prisoner, a felon in your

sight, I cannot believe that you will refuse. If the redskins attack us in the morning, will you permit me to bear arms against them?"

"Ay, if you wish it," assented Caleb Stagg, who had meanwhile entered. "Surely you're to be trusted that far."

"Monsieur, I thank you from my heart," Le Casson replied, with a low bow; and turning on his heel walked slowly from the room.

That a desperate attack would be made before the night had entirely passed was a matter of common belief, and come it did at the expected time, in the early hours of the morning, when the daybreak was hovering between darkness and dawn. The scores of dusky figures, advancing stealthily through the chill purple light, were discovered at long range by the vigilant sentries, who were prompt to give the alarm that called their comrades from heavy sleep. Shouting to one another, rubbing their drowsy eyes, they ran to loophole and platform to meet the danger.

The Pequots, who could not have numbered less than a hundred, first attacked on three sides, coming on with desperate and reckless

valor. But this movement, which proved to be only a cloak to cover more formidable designs, was easily repulsed, and with severe loss to the enemy, who fell back in apparent consternation. The garrison, among whom not a single casualty had occurred, hastily reloaded while they discussed the outlook. A sanguine feeling prevailed, some holding that any number of assaults could be withstood, others going so far as to predict that the siege would be raised without further fighting.

Alas! these were vain and elusive hopes, an unsuspected tribute to the wily foe. The brief breathing-spell, begun at the instant when the savages withdrew, was at an end not three minutes later. A sentry's cry of alarm from the south angle of the enclosure, in which it will be remembered the gate was set, summoned all to that side, where they beheld a truly startling sight. A dozen stalwart savages, picked for speed and strength, had sprung up as if from nowhere, and were dashing straight for the stockade, bearing between them, by the short, spiky remnants of its lopped off branches, the trunk of a by-no-means slender pine-tree. The purpose of the

group was unmistakable, and behind them, and to right and left, the main body of the Indians were in force, having swarmed round under cover of the steep shore of the Connecticut.

"God help us, men, if they get to close quarters," shouted Philemon Kent. "'Twill be all up with us. Remain here, every one of you," he added.

"Nay, we mustn't leave our rear and flanks unguarded," protested Tom Gunstone.

"True for that," cried Caleb Stagg. "The danger is all on this side, I'm thinking, but —— Nathaniel Brewster, do you patrol the other platforms and keep watch."

Rufus and Humfrey, who were together, looked at each other with blanched faces, unable to hide their terror for a moment, and then turned pluckily to take their part in the defense. They dared not trust themselves to think of what would happen if the attack succeeded.

A few seconds—painfully long they seemed —slipped by in breathless suspense. The day was breaking more fully, but the farther distances were still mantled by a gray gloom, and

the surface of the river was hidden by rolling mists. The tree-bearers loomed nearer and nearer, quickening their speed, and behind them came a living, painted wave of savages, as yet ominously silent.

"Ready!" warned Caleb Stagg. "Aim at the fellows with the pine."

The first shot flashed and roared, more following immediately. Whoops and yells, poured from each dusky throat, rose in one fierce, bloodthirsty clamor. Two of the warriors who bore the tree fell, either dead or wounded, and others at once took their places. The garrison held their fire for a moment—every shot would be sorely needed—and that short interval brought the enemy almost to the stockade.

Now was the critical time. So thickly flew the arrows that not a man dared show his head above the palisading. They fired from the loopholes right and left of the gateway, and yet, alas! fired in vain. For, one after another, fresh warriors bounded eagerly to the sacrifice, and with fanatical zeal hurled the heavy battering-ram on to its sinister purpose. As the first terrible blow was launched

against the timbers, tearing several of them loose, Caleb Stagg leaped from the platform with a groan of despair.

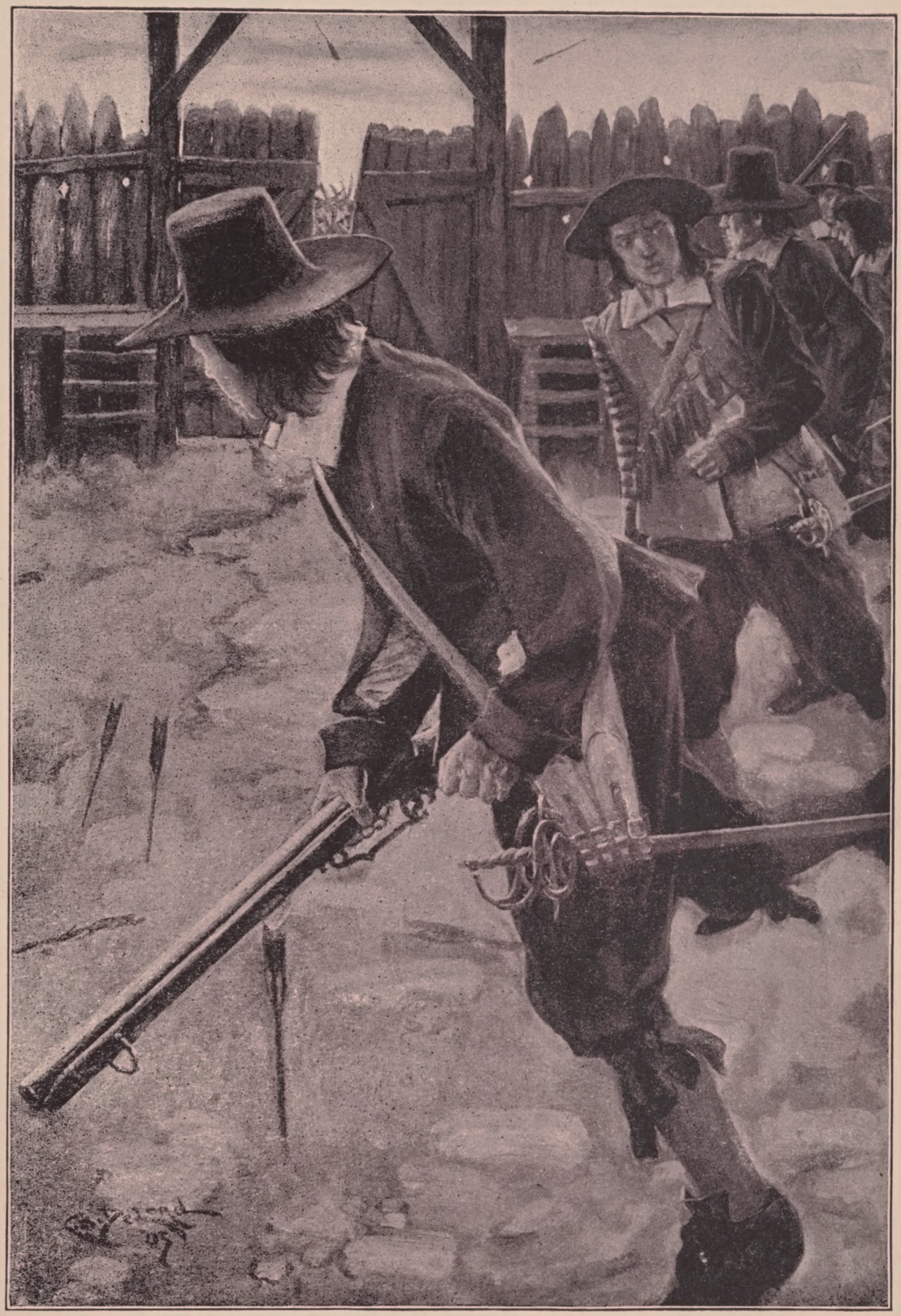
"To the house! to the house!" he cried to his companions, who followed his example.

They darted across the enclosure, rage and dread in their hearts, maddened shrieks and the thunder of smashing blows ringing in their ears. Pausing halfway—where Nathaniel Brewster joined them—they looked back just as the massive gate toppled inward, falling in a chaos of splintered beams. Already, with yells of triumph, the horde were swarming through the breach.

A volley would have proved futile at such a time, and not a charge was wasted. The little band sped on, with arrows winging in pursuit, and were quickly within the shelter of the house. The shutters of every window had previously been closed, and it was the work of an instant to put up the heavy bars of the door.

"We are in God's hands," said Nathaniel Brewster. "He will give us strength."

"We'll be needing it sorely," muttered



THE MASSIVE GATE TOPPLED INWARD

Stagg. "To your posts, men," he added. "Here they come!"

The interval was of scarcely a minute's duration. The house was at first attacked from all four sides, and the garrison, divided among the three rooms, poured a cool and destructive fire from the numerous loopholes. The children were made to lie flat on the floor, and the women bravely loaded the men's weapons. Fortunately ammunition was plentiful, and there were spare firelocks to be had. Dollier Le Casson was one of those occupying the death-chamber, and more than once, amid the volleying musketry, his pathetic gaze turned to the bed where Vaylmer Laplash lay in his long sleep, with the powder-smoke hovering over his waxen features.

The redskins soon withdrew, leaving dead and wounded behind, and sought what cover was available. But meanwhile they were hatching fresh mischief, which Rufus was the first to discover.

"They are bringing the tree!" he shouted.

Some of the defenders climbed hurriedly to the loft, where, through a row of loopholes

pointing downward, they could command the approach to the door. The latter was as well protected from the ground floor, and as the half-score of warriors drew near, bearing the pine, they encountered so deadly a fire that seven of their number dropped. The remainder abandoned the log and fled.

Again the besieged enjoyed a brief lull, and again hope faded—now to utter and terrible despair—as the undaunted savages let fly a cloud of arrows to which were attached flaming bunches of dried grass that had been smeared in bear's oil. Many of these lodged on the roof, setting fire to it, and under cloak of this diversion a great heap of straw was brought from the stable, piled against one end of the house, and ignited. Soon the floor of the loft was blazing in two places, and smoke and sparks began to make the lower rooms unendurable.

Thicker and denser grew the smoke, pouring down from above. The roaring of the flames increased, and ever faster fell the sparks, dancing in the stifling, heated atmosphere.

The end was near. To be burned to death,

or to perish by the tomahawk and the axe—which was it to be? But before the doomed little band could settle the question, just when they realized that the choice must be made without further delay, a wonderful thing happened. Rufus, whom none had missed, burst suddenly into the main room where all were assembled. His eyelids and clothing were singed; his hands were black and blistered.

"I've been in the loft—looking out the loopholes," he cried hoarsely. "Help is coming! White men—lots of them—are climbing over the top of the bank not fifty yards up the river."

Wholly indescribable, not to be pictured in words, was the scene that followed the lad's announcement, which no one thought of doubting. Loud above the clamor rang Caleb Stagg's voice.

"Every man to the front," he shouted, "women and children keep to the rear. We'll rush out and give the varmints a volley, and by then the Wethersfield party will have taken them in flank."

No sooner said than done. Dollier Le

Casson, the first to unbar the door and throw it open, immediately fell backward with an arrow buried deep in his heart. "Vaylmer, mon ami——" he gasped, and died with a smile on his lips.

Leaping over the threshold into the sweet, fresh air, the half-suffocated men emptied their firelocks into the thick of the dancing, howling redskins who swarmed before the house. Missiles flew rapidly, killing Tom Gunstone and wounding several others, and then, a crowd of Connecticut settlers pouring the next instant through the ruined gateway, cheering and discharging muskets, a panic of fear seized upon the surprised and startled Indians. Pursued from two sides, many were ruthlessly slaughtered, the greater part escaping by leaping to the platform and throwing themselves over the stockade.

Meanwhile the women and children had left the burning house, and Rufus and Humfrey, having carried Sir Lanslott to the open air, brought out the body of Vaylmer Laplash, covered with a blanket. By now the enclosure had been cleared of the savages, and the relief-force—more than a score of Wethersfield

men—were mingling with the rescued and grateful garrison.

"Are we all here?" inquired Philemon Kent, when the tumult had subsided a little. "None left behind?"

"Nay, where is Rose?" exclaimed Nathaniel Brewster, turning pale as he glanced about him.

"My child! My poor child!" shrieked Mistress Brewster.

Rose was nowhere to be seen, nor could any remember if she had rushed out with the others. Humfrey, who had crossed to the far side of the palisade to watch the retreating savages, was ignorant of his sister's disappearance, and as for the men gathered about the distracted parents, their first thought was to search the enclosure.

"I'll find her," cried Rufus.

With that he made a dash for the house, but was intercepted by Annis, who clung to his arm.

"Stay!" she pleaded. "'Tis madness, Rufus. You will be burned to death ——"

"Let me go," he said sharply. He shook the girl off and sped on his way. The next instant he had vanished through the open doorway.

Though the roof was now wrapped in flames, and the interior of the house was naturally supposed to be too hot for endurance, the brief interval that had elapsed had really made little difference, so far as the lower floor was concerned. Sparks showered around the plucky lad, and he was enveloped by pungent billows of smoke, as he groped across the main room in the scorching atmosphere, turning this way and that while he called the missing girl by name. There was no response, and each second increased his terrible anxiety. His voice was growing husky, and he was on the point of abandoning the search in despair, when a faint, choking cry came to his ears.

Following the direction of the sound, he steered a course to the end wall. The girl was lying flat, with her face close to the logs, and her life had undoubtedly been saved by the fresh air that filtered through the crevices. A whiff of it partly revived the lad as he stooped and picked up the slim form. Gasping for breath, beating the sparks aside with one arm while in the other he tightly held his burden, he pushed toward the door. He fought on desperately, blinded half the time,

catching an occasional glimpse of light amid the murky smoke-wreaths, and at last he staggered into the open air, to be greeted by cheering loud and long.

Rose opened her eyes and looked up to the flushed and heated face of her rescuer. "Rufus," she said almost inaudibly, "you—won't —go—to England?"

No answer gave the lad, but there was great peace and happiness in his heart, and he knew that the problem of the future was solved, as he put the little maid into her mother's arms.

The redskins, having had enough fighting to last them for a time, either fled from the neighborhood or lurked out of sight in the forest. By noonday the dead had been buried —Laplash and Le Casson in one grave—and of the house nothing remained but a heap of blackened and smouldering ruins. Soon afterward a start was made for the flat-boats in which the relief-force had crossed over—they had been left under guard a half-mile down the river—and evening found the whole party safe at Wethersfield.

CHAPTER XXVII

IN WHICH RUFUS MAKES HIS CHOICE

THE governor's patch of garden lay steeped in bright, warm sunshine, which was pleasantly tempered by the breath of the west wind, laden with the scent of deep woods and clover meadows, that rustled the boughs of the sturdy young pine-trees. The droning of bees revelling in sips of honey, and the perfume of flowers and shrubs, floated through the open window-casement into the cheerful dining-room, where the chief magistrate and one of his distinguished guests—the other had finished and flown—sat still lingering over their breakfast and incidentally discussing the subject that filled their minds. From beyond the palisade, from quarters far and near, came a continuous trampling of feet and a murmuring sound of many voices; for every man, woman, and child was abroad, and every heart was beating with a common excitement.

"If they broke camp at daybreak," said Sir Lanslott Charmion, "they should arrive within the next hour."

"Ay, easily that," assented William Bradford. "They won't be long."

"'Twill be indeed a triumphal return for our gallant young gentleman," continued the baronet. "Good fortune has not spoiled him, so much is certain. He is worthy of it all, and will gracefully fill any position he may be called to. The very first time I clapped eyes on him I remember I was vastly struck by his appearance—'twas when he came aboard the Marygold with Carver Jennicom. 'Sink me! but there's blood and breeding,' said I to myself. And now, to think of it! the lad is heir to an ancient name and a splendid estate, qualifications which will put him in high favor at court."

"The colonies have greater need of him," thought the Governor; but kept silence.

"He was strangely apathetic, to tell the truth," Sir Lanslott went on, "and seemed reluctant to let his adopted father know that the secret was unmasked, though by persuasion I won his consent. 'Twas no small relief

to learn, on arriving at Plymouth, that Jennicom had already unburdened himself of the whole story and made you his confidant. I've had speech with him on several occasions, but he let fall nothing that might serve as a compass to his mind."

"He is a man of few words," replied the Governor.

He shuffled uneasily in his seat, for the subject was growing distasteful to him. The door opened and Mistress Annis passed through the room on her way to the garden, a broad-rimmed hat, gay with plumes and buckle, perched on her raven tresses. She blew a kiss to her father and whisked daintily out of sight.

"Saucy baggage!" exclaimed Sir Lanslott. "'Tis high time I took her home—she's been having her own way entirely too much, and is quite spoiled. We shall sail for England within forty-eight hours, and I hope that Rufus—to call him by his old name—will accompany us. The sooner he presents his claim, and sets the lawyers to work, the sooner he will come into his own. Do you suppose that Jennicom will raise any objections?"

"On the contrary, sir," replied the Governor, "I think you will find that Carver Jennicom is resigned to the inevitable, and that he will put no difficulties whatever in the lad's way."

"Nor could he if he would, strictly speaking."

"Very true. What Jennicom wishes is a different matter. You do not know him as I do, Sir Lanslott. He is a man of sterling worth and character, and you must at least admit that his motives throughout have been to his credit."

"To the credit of his heart and affections, sir. I'll not deny it. Yet I cannot but think that he has shown a lack of sound judgment."

With that, shrugging his shoulders, Sir Lanslott rose and stepped to the window; and Governor Bradford, leaning back in his chair with a sigh, tried to fix his mind on the stirring address which he would shortly be called upon to deliver.

It was a great and glorious day for Plymouth. In honor of the expected event, which was no less than the return of the fighting contingent sent against the Pequots, Sunday attire had been donned, though Sun-

day faces were not worn with it; everywhere, indeed, the proverbial Puritan countenance, wry and sour, was conspicuously absent. Flags and banners danced in the breeze, flapping over the crowd that surged to and fro, constantly agitated by rumors that proved to be false. In the square Jeremy Quills—a proud centre of attraction—stood by the pieces of cannon, ready to thunder forth a salute at the auspicious moment. On board the Marygold, which swung at anchor off the harbor, a culverin had been loaded by Captain Teague's command, and was to hurl back the rolling echoes of the town artillery.

The war was ended—or nearly so—and the Pequots had received such a crushing, well-nigh exterminating blow, that their power to harm the Connecticut settlements was destroyed forever. Preparations had been steadily pushed forward during the spring, and just before the time fixed for action, the result of the operations being in some doubt, a number of women and children of Wethersfield had been sent for safety to Plymouth, which was the nearest point in New England.

Rose and her mother came with them, and Nathaniel Brewster was one of the escort. Sir Lanslott and Annis were also of the party, for the baronet's convalescence had been very slow, and it was expected that the sea air would benefit him; it had done even more, and now, after a fortnight of Governor Bradford's hospitality, he was in the full vigor of health. The Marygold, directly her captain received instructions to that effect, had cruised down the coast from Boston, where at the time a newly-appointed chief magistrate ruled in Governor Vane's stead.

The New England colonies having contributed the quota of men asked for by Governor Winthrop, the Hartford forces under Captain Mason—to which Rufus belonged—joined Captain Underhill's Plymouth detachment, and in three vessels they proceeded to the neighborhood of Narragansett Bay. They disembarked on the 20th of May, and without waiting for the belated Massachusetts men, they advanced stealthily against the Pequot fort, which was on the high bank of the river Mystic. They were accompanied by a force of Indian allies, in-

cluding Narragansetts, Nyantics, and seventy Mohegans led by the chief Uncas.

It need only be said that the operations were entirely successful. After a brief but spirited resistance the stronghold was taken. The torch was ruthlessly applied, and while columns of flame and smoke mounted luridly into the murky night, the incessant rattle of musketry well-nigh drowned the shrieks of the vanquished and the clamor of the victors. During the attack Rufus Jennicom distinguished himself on several occasions, notably when, at the risk of his own life and at the cost of a slight wound, he saved Captain Mason from the tomahawk of an enraged savage.

As the minutes wore on, and the sun climbed higher into the sky, the tumult and bustle increased and rumor followed rumor at short intervals. Though Sir Lanslott's eyes rested on the surging mass in the square, in fancy he was far, far away, delving amid the dead and gone years, recalling scenes and faces and voices.

"To think of it!" he said to himself. "The son of my old friend! Poor Charles Vaylmer! A short life and a merry one, like all the

Vaylmers. 'Twould be a pity if this gallant boy proves to have inherited the family curse. If 'tis in the blood England will bring it out. I trust the day will never dawn when I shall have cause to regret——" he unconsciously added aloud, and stopped.

"Did you address me, sir?" asked the Governor, the thread of his thoughts thus broken into.

"They are coming!" cried Annis, throwing open the door. "Really coming this time. Father, make haste."

The Governor and Sir Lanslott stepped quickly to the garden, where others had already been admitted by a servant, including several of the town selectmen, Captain Miles Standish and Rose Brewster and her parents. Carver Jennicom was also present, his rugged, impassive face telling nothing of his inward feelings.

To hear oneself speak was almost impossible. It was no false report, without doubt, that stirred the crowd. Clear and shrill in the distance sounded the fanfare of a bugle, and loud on the brazen notes struck up the throbbing roll of drums. Eager cries rang like

wildfire from lip to lip. A cannon on the roof of the fort crashed a thunderous welcome, and while the echoes still reverberated Jeremy Quills touched off the pieces of ordnance in the square, and Captain Teague's little culverin barked joyously from the deck of the Marygold. Beadles hurriedly cleared a space before the Governor's house, and men, women, and children were wedged eight and ten deep into animate walls of shouting humanity.

"They are coming!" exclaimed Annis, as she slipped her arm around Rose. "Oh! how I wish I was a soldier. Your brother is with them—and Rufus. Some day he will wear the scarlet uniform of the Life Guards, and the King will be as proud of him as we are now. Why! how sad you look, Rose."

"Nay, do I?" the little Puritan maid answered tremulously, with a brave smile that hid an aching heart.

There was a glimpse of steel and leather up the street. Necks were craned and a thrill convulsed the spectators. Amid cheering long and loud, to the sonorous music of drums, on came the travel-worn column, marching with proud step and uplifted

heads, until, just before the Governor's open gateway, a ringing word of command brought them to a halt. The sun, sliding from under a passing cloud, lighted up the bronzed, soldierly faces, grave with the importance of the occasion, and shone on the fringed mocassins and wampum-belts, the uncouth rattles, and strings of bears' claws and pipes gay with tufts of dyed elk-hair and wings of the red-bird—trophies all of the fight in the Connecticut swamp—that decorated many a musket-barrel and broad-rimmed hat. Humfrey waved a hand to his parents, and Rufus—there he was in the second file, with his right arm slung in a bandage—looked toward the Governor's party and flushed from chin to temple.

As a wave rolls back after smiting a rock-bound coast, so the tumult ebbed to a murmurous silence when Governor Bradford stepped forward and spread out his arms.

"Friends and neighbors," he began, "my gallant men, Plymouth has cause to be proud of you to-day ——"

He spoke briefly and well, with stirring eloquence, and then Captain Standish added a

few words and formally dismissed the returned soldiers, who scattered in search of those nearest and dearest to them. At the Governor's bidding Rufus and Humfrey entered the garden, to encounter warm greetings on all sides, and to feel the rapturous glow of young warriors who have won their guerdons on the field of battle.

Carver Jennicom, holding aloof from the rest, gazed with yearning eyes until his adopted son approached him. His hard features softened as he rested his two hands on the other's shoulders.

"Rufus, dear lad!" he cried in a faltering voice.

"Father! I have come back to you again."

With one impulse, walking side by side, they sought the seclusion of the house, where for the present none followed them. Carver Jennicom hesitated, looking through the window on the noisy, animated scene in the square.

"The time for concealment is past," he said huskily. "You know all, and 'tis best that you should. My boy, we are father and son no longer. The full story of my crime—as some would call it—you shall read in the

diary that I began to keep when you were a tiny child. That I've wronged you I'll not deny. 'Twere nothing less, indeed, to tear you away from name and position and riches, to carry you over-sea, and nurture you amid the most humble surroundings, in a wild and barbarous land. And yet I did it with the fear of God before my eyes. My wife Patience and I were loyal servants to your father. From infancy we watched your growth, learned to love you, and to dread the shadow that threatened to blight your future. And so, when the day of temptation came, we believed that it was our duty to snatch you as a brand from the burning, to save you from the curse of inheritance and the weakness of your forefathers. I was wrong—I see it now. Often I've felt misgivings, have doubted the wisdom of the step that——"

"Nay, I'm the better for it," Rufus broke in. "Father, hear me——"

"I was wrong," Jennicom repeated. "Blood will tell. You are your father's son, and higher ambitions call you with a voice that is stronger than mine. That you go forth into the world well-armed and girded, is the one

ray of light in my sorrow. But the tie is severed, my boy. Wealth and honors await Arthur Vaylmer across the sea, and I send you back to your own with my blessing and my prayers. You've a staunch friend in Sir Lanslott Charmion. May his guiding hand help you to overcome the frailties of the flesh and to lift the name of Vaylmer as high as any in England!"

"I need no guidance from Sir Lanslott," declared Rufus, "and as for my name, whether it be Vaylmer or Jennicom, I would rather lift it high in New England than in the Old World. And that I mean to do, father. I am not going to England ——"

"Not going to England?"

"Nay, that I am not."

"But 'tis too great a sacrifice, my boy. You are wronging yourself. And I may not keep you with me."

"You'll have to," said Rufus. "This is not a hasty decision. I've thought it over long and carefully, and I knew weeks ago what the choice must be. Governor Winthrop has promised to recommend me for an officer's commission, and I intend to stay in

the colonies, and grow up with them, and serve them as you've always wished me to do. 'Tis useless to try to dissuade me—my mind is fixed."

There was that in the lad's ringing tones, in the set expression of his flushed and earnest face, which carried conviction with it and told Jennicom that argument would indeed be fruitless. Marveling greatly, dazed by the unexpected declaration which he could scarcely yet believe, he raised his eyes toward the ceiling.

"Truly wonderful," he murmured in a tremulous voice, "are the ways of Providence ——"

"You've good reason to be proud of your adopted son, Master Jennicom," broke in Sir Lanslott Charmion, as he entered the room with others of the party. "Faith! I wish I had one like him."

"He was lost and is found," Jennicom answered reverently. "Good friends, I cannot prevail upon him. He refuses to go to England ——"

"Refuses?" Sir Lanslott and the Governor cried together.

"Ay, even so."

"And I mean it," vowed Rufus, stepping forward. "I am not ungrateful—don't think that I am. But my place and heart are here, with those among whom I've grown up, and here I shall remain so long as I've a free will to choose."

From this determination he would not recede. Sir Lanslott, after he had got control of his disappointment and consternation, accepted defeat in a most proper spirit.

"I'll say no more," he spoke up, clapping Rufus on the shoulder. "You have my best wishes, and always will have. And if ever you repent, you will find me as ready to serve you as I am now."

"I thank you with all my heart, sir," Rufus replied, "and I am sorry to have grieved you, but I shall not change with time."

He looked briefly toward Rose, who was clinging to her father's arm, and as he read the message her eyes swiftly flashed him he knew indeed that he had chosen the wiser and the happier part, and that the future could hold no regrets.

THE END

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